

Commentary on COLOSSIANS

Christ – the Core of Christianity

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Occasion and Purpose

The occasion or reason for writing this epistle is due to the arrival of Epaphras from Colossae (1:7-8; 4:12-13). He was probably one of Paul's converts while in Ephesus. 1:7 indicates that he, in behalf of Paul (1:7) had evangelized the Lycus Valley (Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea) where Paul himself had never been (2:1). Epaphras reported to Paul about the heresy that had descended upon the churches in these cities. It was called *Gnosticism*: a Greek speculative philosophy that was about 200 years old. It attempted to interpret/explain everything in the light of human reasons. In fact, it was dependent upon human reason.

For over 500 years, Greek philosophy, in its various forms, had been much concerned about the origin and nature of the material universe. So, some of the Greeks who had accepted Christianity sought to interpret/explain the teachings of Christ by making use of their teachings about the separation of matter and spirit. They held that matter was essentially evil (i.e., evil was the very core of its being) and that spirit was essentially good. Thus, God Who is good could not touch matter because of its inborn evil. The material universe could not, therefore, have been created by God.

So, the material universe was created through a series of *intermediate* (or go-between) *agents* called *aeons* which came in between God and matter. These *aeons* were influences which spread out from God and through which He worked to create physical matter. In order to make Christ fit into their philosophical system or way of thinking, they simply made Christ one of the *aeons*. Christ, therefore, was the highest of the aeons - the highest expression of God that there is, but He Himself was not God.

From Christ there developed a long line of other influences from God. The one called **Demiurge** was the one who became the creator of matter. Gnosticism, therefore, reduced Christ to the place of a mere creature from God but not God Himself. In fact, Gnosticism split into two different ways of looking at Jesus Christ: (1) docetic gnosticism held that Jesus did not have a real body, since the body was material and therefore evil. (2) cerinthian gnosticism held that Jesus did have a real body and that Christ was an aeon which came upon Him at His baptism in the form of a dove and left Him while He was on the cross. So, only the man Jesus died on the cross.

The problem for the Greek philosopher who became a Christian was how to span the gap between God, Who was pure, and man, who was sinful. He attempted to do this by using this speculative theory called Gnosticism.

Paul, on the other hand, came forward with another solution to the problem: Christ was not some intermediate agent in the creation of the material universe (1:15-16). He Himself is God and is the very One through whom all creation came into being. Christ Himself is the very creator of the universe and the very One Who sustains it or keeps it going. By becoming a man in a real, physical body, He became the only One Who could bring together or reconcile sinful man with a pure God. In fact, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells solely in Christ – and no one else (1:19; 2:9).

So, Colossians was written over 2000 years ago to address a problem which existed then and which continues to exist today: *the deity of Jesus Christ* – is Jesus God in the flesh or not? 1 John 4:3: "Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God." In Colossae, it was Gnosticism, with a Jewish and ascetic twist. What about today?

The Theme of Colossians

The theme is clear: ***Christ is the core of Christianity*** – “*For in Him the fullness of God lives in a human body and you are complete through your union with Him. He is the Lord over every ruler and authority in the universe*” (2:9-10).

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Exposition¹

I Preliminaries (1:1-2)

A. Author (1:1)

Paul always begins his epistles with a greeting or salutation which identifies himself as the human author. The word apostle is made from two separate words: *apo* – “from” and *stello* – “I send”: Thus, he was a human apostle by divine, not human appointment: “*by the will of God.*”

“*Timothy, our brother*” was a companion of Paul in Rome at the time this epistle was written. It is possible that Timothy was known by the church in Colossae and would thus explain the inclusion of his name at the beginning of this letter.

B. Recipients (1:2)

“Saints” refers to holy ones who have been set apart by God and to God for His exclusive use as His people.

“Faithful” means they are reliable and trustworthy as His people and for His purpose.

“In Christ” means that their sainthood and truthworthiness is a reality because of their vital union with God in Him. This union enables them to bear fruit and to abound in all the work God calls them to do.

“Grace” is the sum total of all spiritual blessings and favors which people receive and experience in God’s unmerited love Jesus Christ to the undeserving.

“Peace” is the absence of inward hostility, distortion, dismay, and disorder; it refers to spiritual well-being which results from and is realized through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

II Prayer (1:3-14)

V. 3 is a notice of *thanksgiving* by Paul and Timothy (“we”) for them and to let them know that *gratitude* was at the core of their prayers in their behalf.

A. Paul & Timothy’s prayer was for their “faith, love, and hope” (v. 4-5).

“Faith” was their human response of trust to the trustworthiness which they had “heard” about in God through Jesus Christ and which God deserved from them. They had “heard” about their faith in Christ Jesus” from Epaphras (1:8; 2:1), since Paul did not have personal knowledge of the Colossian church as a result of a previous visit there.

“love to all the saints” – was the other side of the coin of faith. Love is the inevitable manifestation of true faith in Christ. The two are inseparable in

¹ Greek words will be transliterated into English and italicized.

reality and are associated in Gal. 5:6 and Eph. 6:23.

“Hope” is the living present confidence one has in the promises of God for the present and the future (“which is laid up for you in heaven” – this “living hope” is mentioned in 1 Peter 1:3 as being based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead).

“whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” – That is, they heard the word of the truth of the gospel from Epaphras before the error of the Gnostics crept in. They should have been immune to the shallow speculations since they were recipients of divine revelation.

B. Paul and Timothy’s prayer was for the fruitfulness of the gospel (v. 6)

“in all the world” means that the gospel was expanding or spreading throughout all the then-known world of the Roman empire. As it was growing “in all the world” it was also bringing forth fruit as outward evidence of that growth. From the beginning of their reception of the gospel, to the time Paul was writing this letter, they were known for their fruitfulness.

C. Paul and Timothy’s prayer was for Epaphras who had reported to them about the Colossians love in the Spirit (v. 7-8)

Epaphras was the channel through whom they had come to know the grace of God in truth, and thus, perhaps, the founder of the church in Colossae. We do not anything about him, except what we learn through Paul’s references to him. He is here described as “our dear fellow-servant” and “a faithful minister of Christ.” It is possible that he was being discredited by the false teachers at Colossae, and that the Colossian Christians were disposed to disregard the Gospel which they had heard from him. If so, this would account for the strong endorsement of him at the beginning of this letter.

Epaphras was the one who had told or brought news to Paul and Timothy about their “love in the Spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit, not Greek speculative philosophy, Who was the source of their love and this truth is underscored very early, both as a reminder of the truth and as a motive to continue in that truth.

D. Paul and Timothy’s prayer that they will know the will of God (v. 9 -10)

“For this cause/reason” – In view of what has been said about their faith and love, their faith and fruitfulness, and the spreading of the gospel over the world.

“we” – Paul and Timothy

“do not cease” – This does not mean that they are always in the typical posture of prayer (bent knees and closed eyes) but that they are always in the atmosphere

of prayer by continued communion with God on an oft-repeated basis.

The object of prayer is now specified: “that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” – The word for “knowledge,” *epignosis*, refers to full or additional knowledge beyond that which they already possess. In other words, continued knowledge of His revealed will. This word is also found in v. 10, as well as 2:2 and 3:10. [It is found 16 additional times in Paul’s writings (Rom. 1:28; 3:20; 10:2; Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Phil. 1:9; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25, 3:7; Tit. 1:1; Philemon 6; Heb. 10:26). Peter uses it 4 times in his 2nd letter (1:2, 3, 8; 2:20)]. Therefore, Paul uses this word as the keynote to his reply against the arrogance of Gnosticism. The alternative to intellectual philosophical speculation is God-based revelation about Jesus Christ in the Word of God. To understand God’s wisdom and the spiritual understanding which results from that wisdom is no small matter of concern.

By so doing, they will be walking in a manner “worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” – In other words, God’s will reveals itself as people live in a way that honors and pleases God by doing good and kind things for others. As such occurs, they will simultaneously “be increasing in the knowledge of God.” In other words, they will thereby demonstrate that they are getting to know God better and better, fulfilling the Christian ideal, as revealed in their obedience and fruit-bearing.

- E. Paul and Timothy’s prayer that they realize the power to do so belongs to God (v. 11).

By “being strengthened or empowered according to His glorious power,” not that of the Gnostics or even themselves, they will realize that this astonishing strength or might comes only from God and is accompanied by a manifestation of His presence.

As a result, they will be enabled with “patient endurance, perseverance, steadfastness, and the ability to remain obedient under the difficulties they face without succumbing to those difficulties in despair. They will march forward with a spirit that does not retaliate or seek revenge.

- F. Paul and Timothy’s prayer is to be thankful for what God has done for us in Christ (v. 12-14)

Paul notes 3 things which God has done: (1) “He has made us meet or fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” – I.e., He qualified or made us capable to share the inheritance that belongs to God’s holy people who live in the light of God’s Word. (2) “He delivered us from the power of darkness” – I.e., He rescued us from the authority of the evil which once governed our lives. He freed us from its slavery when “He translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” – I.e., He transferred us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Here Paul refutes or rules out the whole Gnostic philosophical

system of aeons or influences which descended downward from Christ. No, He alone is the King of all kingdoms. 3) “In Whom we have redemption through His blood: the forgiveness of sins” – I.e., Only in Jesus Christ has God paid the penalty for all sins (past, present, future) and set us free or released us from the debt of having to make the payment ourselves. Here Paul says exactly what redemption is: the forgiveness or cancellation of sins because the once-held captives of sin have now been released. ***No wonder Paul and Timothy’s prayer was one of “thanksgiving.”***

III Primacy of Christ (1:15-23)

Here the primacy or pre-eminence of Christ is presented as the central teaching in this epistle/letter. Such primacy reveals itself in 3 areas:

A. Christ is Lord of Creation (1:15-17)

Christ is “the image of the invisible God” – I.e., He is the outward, visible expression of the invisible God. The word translated “image” is *eikon* from which we get the English word “icon” for *picture, figure, representation*. Christ is the One Who brings out most clearly the contrast between the seen and the unseen. In Christ, God manifests Himself, even though He still remains the invisible God. The invisible God became visible in the Incarnation (birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension) and there is no need for speculation about Who He is and what God is like. Jesus Christ is the most perfect picture of God which has ever been taken.

Christ is also “the firstborn of every creature or all creation” – I.e., He is the One in Whom creation had its beginning and He retains supremacy in rank and dignity over all creation. Paul thus refutes the Gnostics who pictured Christ as one of the aeons by placing Him before “all creation.” This does not mean that He came first in the order of creation because He was not created.

In v. 16, the “for” indicates that Paul is giving an additional reason for the primacy of Christ in the work of creation: “In Him” – every created thing or the creation as a whole came into being “in Him.” This is another swipe at the Gnostic. “Created” refers to the divine act of calling into being that which did not exist prior to the calling. “in the heavens and on the earth” – This begins a list of created objects which comprehends all things in the regions above and all things below. In order to counter the potential idea that Paul may have been only referring to physical and visible things, he adds: “things visible and invisible.” So, he is referring not only to material things but also to personal and spiritual beings.

“thrones, dominions, principalities, powers” – As a Jew, Paul no doubt believed in the existence of angels and hierarchies but that is not his point or purpose here. Rather, he is speaking from the viewpoint of the false

teachers and refuting their teachings. So, his point is clear: no matter what be the rank or power or dignity of their angelic beings (of which Christ was one, in their thinking), Christ is far above all of them, for He alone is the Supreme Creator. God is not some far away spiritual being who needs intermediate agencies to do His material work of creation. No, He created it all and then became one of us so that “in Him” God and man are united, with Christ as the Mediator.

“by Him” denotes Him as the agent of creation and “for Him” denotes that He is the goal of creation: it all moves toward Him and its outcome is determined for His purposes.

“He is before all things” – The present tense verb used here significantly conveys the idea of His eternal existence. He is “before” all things, not *among* all things.

“In/ By Him all things hold together” – I.e., He is the center and the sustaining support of the existence of all things. He is *God’s Glue* for keeping it all together and in proper motion. He is the controlling and unifying force in all nature. In refuting Gnostic philosophy, Paul is declaring that all matter is not evil because Christ Himself, the Icon of God, is the Creator and Sustainer of the material universe.

B. Christ is the Lord of the Church (1:18-19)

“He is the head of the body, the church” – This means that He governs the Church and is the source of her life. Christ is the basis and bond of unity in the church. Just as there is unity between the head and the body of human beings so that the body functions as it should, so, this is a most appropriate way to look at the relationship of Christ to the Church. “The body” is emphasized because the false teachers taught that matter is evil in all its forms. Paul, again, counters this false teaching.

“the beginning” – Christ is the beginning of a new spiritual creation in the Church.

“the firstborn from the dead” – He is the first one to be raised from the dead and to never die again.

“that in all things he might have the preeminence” – The word translated “preeminence,” *proteuon* means **to have first place or be above all else**. Reference is to His superiority in regard to time, power, and function.

This matter of preeminence is anchored in the fact that “in Him should all the fullness dwell” – I.e., the totality of God’s divine nature was pleased to dwell in Him. In other words, all of God’s love, power, and other divine

attributes were perfectly at home in Him and gathered up in their fullness in Him – another dagger for the false teachers who said that all the divine attributes were distributed among various aeons. Paul, thus, gathers all of them up in Christ: a full and forceful declaration of His divinity. No one else, therefore, is qualified to be Lord of the Church.

C. Christ is Lord at the Cross (1:20-23)

“And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself” – Christ is not only the agent and medium of creation but also the agent and medium of reconciliation. The only way to be restored to God and find harmony with God is in subjection to Christ. This is true for all human beings, as well as the whole universe of things spiritual and things material.

The purpose and aim of the entire ministry of Jesus was “reconciliation.” According to Paul in 2 Cor. 5:17-21, that ministry is now being shared with the church, His body, the agent through which He continues reconciliation.

This reconciliation comes as a result of His “having made peace with everything on earth and in heaven through the blood of His cross” – Because all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt permanently in Him, He alone was equal to the task of making reconciliation possible and available. “Peace” refers to *binding together*. So, by His death on the cross, He binds together a holy God and repentant sinful people whose faith is in the sufficiency of that sacrifice. This includes all people who were “once alienated” or separated from God as “enemies in your mind by wicked works.” In other words, this former state of enmity and alienation from God showed itself in their “wicked works” (cp. Mt. 7:17) – the very sphere or arena or atmosphere in which they had lived.

“yet now hath He reconciled” – From the moment of their positive faith response to the truth of the gospel, they had been reconciled or bound together “in the body of His flesh.” Here Paul combines both *soma* (“body”) and *sarx* (“flesh”) to stress the humanity of Jesus. He did this to once again refute the false teachers who denied His humanity.

“through death” – To reinforce what he said in vs. 20 (“through the blood of His Cross”), Paul uses these specific words. The false teachers said that reconciliation with God could only be achieved by purely spiritual beings, not by Jesus Christ Who had a body of flesh. So, Paul emphasizes that it was the very fact of His being put to death in a body of flesh that was the actual means by which reconciliation with God was accomplished. This excludes purely spiritual beings, like angels, who have no body of flesh.

To stress another dimension of this divinely-initiated action in reconciliation, one additional statement of purpose is stated: “to present you holy and faultless or blameless and unchargeable before Him or in His sight.” Paul has been referring

to the present condition of having been reconciled to God and it would not be appropriate to now refer to some far off, distant consequence of reconciliation. Rather, he now identifies another present meaning of reconciliation: “to present” *now* the reconciled ones before God as acceptable and unrejected; no longer enemies but friends (Eph. 2:11-22); justified (*as if they had never sinned*) or declared righteous (2 Cor. 5:17-21); presented to God as spiritually complete (1:28; 2:10; Heb. 10:14); having access to God (Rom. 5:1-2; 8:33-39); and made alive together with Christ (2:13-15; Eph. 2:1-6). So, reference is not to receiving God’s acceptance on judgment day but their present acceptance before God everyday.

YES, Christ is Lord at the Cross and that is meant to motivate His people to “[if ye] continue in the faith, having been grounded or established firmly and steadfast or settled and not being moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard when it was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I Paul became a servant/minister.”

This first class conditional phrase indicates that Paul assumed they would continue in the faith since they had been grounded in God’s once-for-all-act at the cross, an act that had permanent results of them having been placed on the foundation of Jesus Christ Himself. The simultaneous action of having been grounded and being steadfast is that of “not being moved away from the hope which is in the gospel.” This message had been preached all over the then known world and Paul was one of its ministers. The message was clear: Christ is Lord at the Cross. There is, therefore, no need to pay attention to false teachers who only speculate and hesitate because they are not grounded, are not steadfast, and are not dependable. Like all philosophers, they had rather *seek* than *find*. So, where speculation abounds, revelation is aborted.

IV Proclamation of Christ (1:24-29)

“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you” – Although Paul was in prison at the time of writing this letter, and was surrounded with various sorts of suffering, he, nevertheless, maintained an attitude of joyfulness or rejoicing. After all, the suffering was primarily for others because he was a minister who participated in the redemptive mission of Jesus Christ in preaching the gospel. Although not stated here, “the sufferings” may have included such matters he clearly revealed in 2 Cor. 11:23-28.

“and am completing what remains of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for the sake of His body, which is the church” – The present tense verb indicates that the sufferings are because of his association with Jesus and are *ongoing* either as the norm for being a Christian or because of his role in preaching the gospel (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:10-11; Phil. 3:10). Thus, to “fill up” or “complete” the sufferings indicates participation with Christ as a member of His body, the church. His own explanation “in my flesh for the sake of His body” sums it up: it is “in” his personal body that he suffers “for” the body of Christ. This is a theme which may have been embedded in Paul’s mind as a result of his

encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-4), and which body-connection he referred to in such places as Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22-23; 3:6; 4:12-16; 5:23, 30.

“of which [church] I became a minister according to the management responsibility God gave to me for you to fully proclaim the Word of God” – Instead of persecuting the church, Paul now joyfully testifies that because of His grace (Rom. 12:3; 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10; Gal. 2:9), God made Paul a part of that church and gave him the responsibility to manage the task of fully, not partially, proclaiming His Word.

“the mystery, having been hidden from ages and from generations – but now made known to His saints” – With *mysterion*, Paul picks up a word used by Jesus in Mt. 13:11; Mk. 4:11; and Lk. 8:10 with regard to describing the kingdom of God. He used the same word variously in Rom. 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19; 2 Thess. 2:7; and 1 Tim. 3:9, 16. He now uses it to define or describe the Word of God. The Gnostics frequently talked about mysteries. So, Paul uses the term with which they were somewhat familiar and filled it with additional meanings which exceeded their previous conceptions: “the Gentiles have an equal share with the Jews in all the riches inherited by God’s children . . . and enjoy together the promise of blessings through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:3-6). It is, of course, within the Word of God that the wisdom of God is contained and conveyed. For example, the mystery of God about the incarnation (birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and glorification of Jesus) is not attained by worldly wisdom but by God’s disclosure. God’s wisdom existed before the world began (1 Cor. 2:7), was concealed for ages, and was hidden in God Himself (Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:8; Eph. 3:9). In the proclamation of the Word of God, however, the truth about this mystery *reveals* “to His saints” [God’s selected & set apart people from the rest of the world] what was previously *concealed* from previous generations (v. 26; Eph. 3:5).

“to whom God wished to make known what is the wealth of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” – God decided both *when* the mystery would be made known and *to whom* it would be made known. “To whom” refers back “to His saints” – the Gentiles and Jews who come together as equal participants in God’s promise, and Paul describes this as “the wealth or riches of the glory” of it. Paul also worded it elsewhere: “the riches of His glory” (Rom. 9:23) and the “unsearchable or endless treasures” (Eph. 3:8).

It now comes to ultimate meaning in the words, “Christ in you, the hope of glory,” for only in Christ are “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3) to be found. In 2:2, Paul states that Christ Himself is the mystery of God. His indwelling Presence in both Jew and Gentile alike make all people “new creations or creatures” (2 Cor. 5:17-18) and is the pledge of future glory. “Glory” refers to the Presence of God being known among Jew and Gentile equally – both now and forever.

So, this mystery involves good news for the present, as well as good news for the future when the change in lives will be completed at the end, when even death itself is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:51-58).

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom” – “Him,” obviously, refers back to Christ and Christ being in you. The word translated “proclaim,” *katangello*, occurs in Acts 10 times (4:2; 13:5, 38; 15:36; 16:17, 21; 17:3, 13, 23; 26:23) and 6 other times by Paul (Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:1; 9:14; 11:26; Phil. 1:16, 18) and is variously translated “preached, shew, teach, declared.” It is not one of the normal words used for “preaching” (*euangelizo* – 55 times and *kerusso* – 65 times). After all, the two present participles, *noutheteo*² – “warning, exhortation, admonishing,” and *didasko*³ – “teaching,” may be understood to explain more completely what this kind of preaching involved. I.e., it was not evangelistic preaching but preaching which involved alerting people to potential dangers and teaching them practical knowledge for more effective daily living. This was to be done “in all wisdom,” perhaps revisiting what he had earlier said in vs. 9. Nevertheless, it was a kind of preaching which was needed then, as well as today.

In fact, Paul’s next phrase actually reinforces this perspective or interpretation: “in order that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” The word translated “perfect, mature,” *teleios*, signifies spiritual maturity, completeness, and wholeness. This is how the word was used by Jesus in Mt. 5:48; 19:21, and how Paul used it in Rom. 12:2 1 Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:15, and Col. 4:12.

In vs. 29, Paul confirms this idea of completeness or desire for maturity in his own life. In fact, he uses the word *kopiaō* to describe how he “labors, works hard, strives to the point of weariness” to achieve this goal. He uses this same word elsewhere to denote the labors and hard work he and others exercise in preaching and other facets of ministry (Rom. 16:6, 12; 1 Cor. 4:12; 15:10; 16:16; Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; 1 Tim. 4:10; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:6).

Furthermore, he adds two present participles to underscore this meaning of the word: (1) *agonizomai* suggests striving, so as to contend for an important goal. Paul used this word in 1 Tim. 6:12 where he commanded the man of God to “*fight* the good fight of faith.” In 2 Tim. 4:7 he said that he personally had “*fought* the good fight of faith.” Since “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17), then Paul must have not only preached the Word but also had his own faith built up by what he heard when he preached, as well as hearing others do the same. (2) *energeo* suggests the exerting of

² This word is used by Paul in Rom. 15:14 to “admonish one another”; in 1 Cor. 4:14 to “warn you”; in Col. 3:16 about “admonishing one another”; in 1 Thess. 5:12 to “admonish you” and in 5:14 to “warn them”; and in 2 Thess. 3:15 to “admonish him.”

³ This word is used by Paul in Rom. 12:7 about the gift of “teaching”; in 1 Cor. 4:17 “as I teach everywhere in every church”; in 1 Cor. 11:14 about “nature teaches you”; in Gal. 1:12 about being “taught by the revelation of Jesus Christ”; in Eph. 4:21 about being “taught by Jesus”; in Col. 2:7 about “having been taught” and in 3:16 about “teaching one another” [along side “admonishing”]; in 2 Thess. 2:15 about “the traditions which ye have been taught”; in 1 Tim. 4:11 and 6:2 to “teach” good doctrine; in 2 Tim. 2:2 “to teach others”; and in Titus 1:11 about “vain talkers and deceivers who are teaching things which they ought not.”

active energy or power in an activity. Paul uses this same word in 1 Cor. 12:6, 11 and Gal. 3:5 to describe the “working” of the Holy Spirit; in Gal. 2:8, the “working” of God in both Peter and Paul; and in Phil. 2:13 and 1 Thess. 2:13, the general “working” of God in His people to do His good pleasure. So, preaching the Word of God has manifold meanings and applications.

By adding the words, *en dunamei*, Paul denotes that the striving and exertion would not be in vain but would be made possible by the “power” or “ability” which God provides to His followers. Paul, therefore, here returns to what he said earlier in 1:11: human efforts and divine ability to achieve go together like hand in glove. This truth is also referenced by Paul in 1 Cor. 12:6, 11; Ga. 2:8; and Phil. 2:13.

V Pastoral Concern (2:1-7)

Paul was no dispassionate person in his commitment to Christ and serving Him, so, it is no wonder that he possessed such passionate, pastoral concern for the Christians at Colosse, Laodicea and others who did not know him personally (“my face in the flesh”). So strong was his concern for all of them that he wanted them to know what “great conflict, agony” he has for them. The word, *agon*, refers to the “struggling, fighting, or agonizing” he mentioned in 1:29. He does not identify what form the agonizing took. However, in Rom. 15:30, he uses the same root word, coupled with the preposition, *sun*, for the word *sunagonizomai*, translated “strive or join together with” and is used in reference to “prayers.” So, perhaps, the same applies here as well. Whatever he is referring to, it is “for you, in your behalf.”

The purpose of his concern for them is now specified: “that their hearts may be strengthened, having been united in love and in all the wealth of the full assurance of understanding - that is, in full knowledge of the mystery of God: Christ”

“Hearts” refers to their inner selves or personhood which needed to be “strengthened” due to the attacks of the false teachers about Christ. The very reason behind this need is the fact that they had already been united, knit and brought together or reconciled (1) *in love*⁴ and (2) *in all the wealth of the full assurance of understanding*,⁵ and *in full knowledge of the mystery of God: Christ*.⁶

In verse 3, Paul continues to hammer the Gnostics and their false teachings: “in whom all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge are present.” It is only *in Christ* that the fullness or totality of all wisdom and knowledge about ultimately significant religious matters (values, ideals, fundamentals, substance, essentials) actually exist. All philosophical speculations by the Gnostics are insufficient and deficient.

⁴ In 3:14, he calls *love* “the bond which unites everything in complete harmony or maturity.”

⁵ This wealth consists of the conviction or certainty of their comprehension about the truth of who Christ is.

⁶ This is *epignosis* or “full, additional knowledge” about “the mystery” he mentioned in 1:26. The Gnostics only had partial or limited *gnosis* (“knowledge”) which was perverted by its limitations or restrictions. By means of apposition (one word added to explain another), he says the mystery is Christ Himself.

In v. 4, with “this I am saying,” it is like the more he thought about these great claims for Christ, the more he wanted to say, as if to underscore their startling significance. What a tragedy it would be not to gladly grab these glorious truths or to be led astray from them by the false claims of others. That potential motivated Paul to add to what he was saying: “that no one may deceive you with attractively false arguments.”

The words *paralogizomai*⁷ and *pithanologia*⁸ denote words beside other words which delude or defraud people into faulty conclusions. Paul is clearly warning against the presence of popular, yet poisonous, religious philosophers and others who presented what sounded like plausible and pleasing propositions. To all of them Paul says, “No, Christ Himself is all you need.”

Apparently, the majority of his readers were true to Christ. Because of his imprisonment [in Rome] (4:10), he could not be in their presence physically, only “in the spirit,” that is, in his thoughtful, heartfelt concern for them. But even though physically absent, he, from a distance, is “rejoicing and seeing the orderly discipline and firmness of your faith in Christ.” *Taxis* (“orderly discipline”) is a military term which refers to the orderly manner or arrangement in which soldiers march, despite a few stragglers along the way. Paul uses the same word in 1 Cor 14:40 about *orderly worship*.

Stereoma (“firmness”) is another military term indicating a solid basis or foundation. This is the only place in the NT where this word is found and suggests a defensive protection or safeguard against the enemy.

By combining these two terms, Paul stresses that the majority of them are standing solidly “in your faith in Christ.” This reconnects with “your faith in Christ” (1:4) and will be continued in 1:6-7.

“Therefore, in the same way you received Christ Jesus the Lord [by your *faith in Christ*], keep on walking in Him” – By the comparative *hos* [so, in such a way, in the same manner as] Paul continues to stress the importance of faith. One enters a relationship with God by faith in Christ and continues in that relationship in the same manner.

For the fourth time in this letter (1:2, 3, 10), Paul applies the term “Lord” (*kurios* – an OT word for Jehovah) to Christ Jesus. [He will do so again in 3:16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24 (twice), 4:7, 17.]

The word of command translated “walk,” *peripateo*, is used 32 times⁹ by Paul as an expression of living one’s life or conducting one’s manner of living. In other words, life is to be lived (present tense verb) in accordance with standards, ideals, and principles which manifest to others the Lordship of Jesus Christ (“in Him or in union with Him and His influence on one’s daily living).

⁷ This is the only time where Paul uses the word, although it also occurs in James 1:22.

⁸ This is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament. It is composed of two words: *peithos* for “persuasive or skillful,” and *logos* for “word.”

⁹ Rom. 6:4; 8:1, 4; 13:13; 14:15; 1 Cor. 3:3; 7:17; 2 Cor. 4:2; 5:7; 10:2, 3; 12:18; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15; Phil. 3:17, 18; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1, 12; 2 Thess. 3:6, 11.

The command to keep on walking by faith in Christ is **based upon (1)** an accomplished fact with its present result (perfect passive participle): *errizomenoi* - “having been rooted” (as a securely-rooted plant which ensures fruit-bearing [1:10]) – only here and in Eph. 3:17; and **reveals itself in: (2)** a continuing process of dependent development (present passive participle): *epoikodomoumenoi* - “being built up” – both of which take place “in Him,” i.e., in the sphere of His living presence and power; **(3)** a continuous process of firmness (present passive participle): *bebaioo* - “being strengthened or firmly established in the faith” – the foundational truths of the Christian faith (without adding Greek speculative philosophies, such as Gnosticism) which they “had been taught” (1st Aorist Indicate Passive) by Epaphras (1:7; cp. 1:28; 3:16); and **(4)** a continuous process of thanksgiving (present active participle): *perisseuo* – “more than enough, overflowing” *en eucharistia* “in thanksgiving” – the only appropriate atmosphere or acceptable mindset in which “walking in Him” takes place (cp. the verb form of this word, *eucharistountes*, in 1:12).

VI Philosophy to be Avoided (2:8)

Blepete me means “watch, beware of, look to” and indicates warning of some concrete danger. That danger is “someone who tries to captivate you through or by means of philosophy and empty deceit,” the characteristics of which he also describes as “corresponding to or in accordance with the traditional teachings of men and the elemental supernatural spiritual powers which operate in the world and not according to Christ.”

The word *sulagogen* means “to make a captive of, to lead or carry off, rob, make spoil of, despoil, kidnap.” This is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament. So, reference is to some speaker or group seeking to carry people off or kidnap them with their philosophical human speculations, devoid of God’s divine revelation, and their meaningless, deceptive use of words to achieve their objective. The word *kenes* means “empty, without content, devoid of truth, futile, and purposeless.” The word *apates* means “deception, deceit.” So, the philosophy of mere human beings does not impress God or reflect His divine dealings with man. It only undermines faith in Christ.

The word *philosophy* itself, simply means “love of wisdom” and may apply positively to many different subjects or fields. Here, however, this “philosophy” is linked negatively with: (1) “the traditional teachings of men” in which the desire for God’s revelatory teachings is not sought but rather replaced with superior ideas and aims of Gnosticism and/or other selfishly partisan teachings; and (2) “the elementary or basic principles and powers of the world” – This refers to the base desires by which the world operates: “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:15-17). The word *stoicheia*¹⁰ also includes all the weak, material, beggarly elements which worldly people use to worship God and by which they claim to access God and come to know Him. Since it is not “in accordance with or according to Christ,” it is a phony philosophy.

¹⁰ This word is also used by Paul in verse 20 of this chapter, as well as 1 Cor. 1:21; Gal. 4:3, 9.

VII Privileges in Christ (2:9-15)

With *hoti* (“because”) Paul explains why *kata Christov* (“according to Christ”) is so significant – i.e., he notes the privileges of knowing Christ. In these seven verses, he pivots his explanation around seven occurrences of the words “in Him” (*en auto* - v. 9, 10, 15) or “in whom” (*en ho* - v. 11, 12) or “together with Him” (*sun auto* - v. 12, 13).

V. 9 – “in Him dwells all the fullness of the deity or godhead in bodily form” – The false teachers taught that the totality of the divine was distributed among various powers or forces throughout history. So, now, Paul returns to what he expressed in 1:19 and expands it here: God’s whole being of absolute perfection actually lives in Him Who took on a human body in which He revealed all we need to know about God. I.e., during His earthly life and ministry, all the characteristics or features of God made their home in Him. Here Paul not only destroys docetic Gnosticism which said that Jesus had no human body but also cerentian Gnosticism which said that the divine aeon or influence came upon Him at His baptism but left Him at the cross. To the contrary, Paul says that both the humanity and the deity of Jesus Christ were true throughout His days on this earth.

V. 10 – “and you are made full or complete in Him Who is the head of every ruling power and authority” – Since Christ is the very embodiment of the fullness of God, then those who are “in Him” share or participate in that fullness and there is no need to look elsewhere for completeness. After all, the participle *pepleromenoi* is a periphrastic perfect tense which stresses completed action, as well as the continuance of that completed action. So, for a person to exist in a state of fullness means that no one and nothing else is required for completion or fullness.

Furthermore, Paul reinforces this truth by reaffirming the headship or preeminence of Christ over all other ruling and authoritative forces in the universe (cp. 1:16; 2:8). Therefore, confidence in Christ should be the compelling reason to counter any and all other claims against Him and His sufficiency.

V. 11 – “in Whom also you were circumcised with a handlessly made circumcision in the setting free of the body made up of flesh [from which sin springs], in the circumcision of Christ” – The adjective *acheiropoietos* is found only 3 times in the NT: Mk. 14:58; 2 Cor. 5:1; and here where it denotes a spiritual circumcision (cp. Rom. 2:28-29; 2 Cor. 3:3; Phil. 3:3). This spiritual circumcision removes or sets free or strips away our physical bodies from the dominion of sin to being temples of the Holy Spirit and agents or instruments through whom righteous deeds are done (Rom. 6:12-14; Gal. 5:16-25). Circumcision of the heart is thus another way of referring to our regeneration or redemption from sin. So, the physical outward circumcision of a piece of flesh emphasized by the Jews is in contrast to the spiritual inward circumcision of the heart. Thus, “by the circumcision of Christ,” meaning the true circumcision which was made possible by Him, the power of the sinful nature was broken, although not eradicated. The temptation to sin remains (cp. 1 Jn. 1:8), but its power over believers has been severely wounded and can only be as strong as believers allow it to be. Nevertheless, its *dominion* is now over.

In v. 12, *suntaphentes auto en to baptismo*, “having been buried together with Him in baptism,” is an imagery which depicts a personal surrender (immersion) to God and identification with and acceptance of Jesus’ death in our behalf. Since baptism involves an immersion into water, it also includes an emersion out of the water. So, Paul adds, *en ho kai sunegerthete*, “in Whom also you were raised with Him,” to indicate our further association, identification or union with Him in resurrection to new life (cp. Rom. 6:3-14). Paul then adds the means by which these truths were achieved: *dia tes pisteos tes energeias tou theou tou egeirantos auton ek vekron* – through faith in the energetic power of God Who raised Him from the dead.” “Faith” not only receives what God offers in His grace but also requires a commitment of obedience to God in the shared resurrection to new life in Christ. Baptism, therefore, is most significant as it depicts a real and vital spiritual death to the old life, burial, and resurrection from a sinful state into divine life with Christ.

Here in v. 13, the old life is presented as a state or condition of spiritual death: “And you being dead in the transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh” – Before a making alive or resurrection can occur, “death” itself must be experienced. So, Paul here points out that their spiritual death was located “in” or “due to transgressions,” that is, individual sinful actions which verified their being enemies of God (cp. 1:21). These trespasses or sins were not some minor lapse from what was normally good. They were major falls or lapses or deviations from the uprightness and truth which God requires.

This state or condition of spiritual death is also revealed as “the uncircumcision of your flesh” – This condition is the exact opposite of “a handlessly made circumcision” or *peritome acheiropoiotos* (v. 11). It represents corrupt yearnings, impulses, longings, passions, cravings, and other impurities which spring from one’s lower sinful nature (*sarx* = “flesh”) and reveal that one is alienated from God.

Yet, to these very ones, “He made you alive together with Him” – This is another way of referring to the figure in v. 12: “in Whom also you were raised with Him.” In other words, they were resurrected to new life in Christ when He “forgave us all sins, trespasses, transgressions.” What a privilege: complete and total forgiveness results in *death* being overcome by this new *life in Christ*.

An additional privilege, noted in v. 14, from being in Christ is that of His “having blotted out or obliterated the record of indebted rules & regulations which was opposed or hostile to us, having permanently taken it away by having nailed it to the cross” – The word for “the record of indebtedness” is *cheirographon* and occurs only here in the NT; it depicts a certified record of indebtedness which involves condemnation due to utter sinfulness. It is further described as *tois dogmasin*, “the rules & regulations, consisting of decrees,” which were contained in the Mosaic law and only led to condemnation (Rom. 7:5f; Gal. 3:19f). It is also added that the record “was against or hostile to us” (*ho en upernantion emin*). This *hupenantion* (“against or hostile”) is another word which is found only here in Paul’s writings.¹¹ It speaks of a record of claims against us which we could never measure up to or fulfill. Thus, He abolished or set them aside completely or took them

¹¹ It is also found in Heb. 10:27 and is translated “enemies or adversaries.”

out of the picture totally (*ek tou mesou* – “out of the middle, set aside from among us”) and He did so on a permanent basis (*erken* – Perfect Indicate Active). The accusing record no longer stands between God and His people. This is another way of saying, “He forgave us all our transgressions” (v. 13).

But how did He do it? What was the means by which He accomplished such a radical feat? By “*having nailed it to the cross*.” That is, by *His* sacrificial, substitutionary death on the cross, *our* certificate of indebtedness is cancelled, no longer valid, and its charges of guilt and condemnation are destroyed (Rom. 3:24-26; 8:3-4). The law is not destroyed but its condemnation of transgressions is.

The last privilege in Christ related to the significance of His sacrifice is noted in vs. 15: “having deprived or stripped the rulers and authorities of power, He made a public example having publicly triumphed over them in Him” – *apekdusamenos* is the verb form of the noun *apekdusis* in 2:11 and speaks of stripping the power off of these spiritual forces, like taking old, worn-out useless clothes or rags off the body and being degraded thereby. *edeigmatisen en parresia* refers to publicly disgracing or putting to shame as a bad example before others. *Thriambeusas* is found only here and 2 Cor. 2:14. It refers to celebrating a victory or leading in a triumphant train, so that the cross may actually be viewed as a victoriously ridden chariot. By adding, *en auto* (“in Him”), Paul leaves no doubt as to how and when God rode triumphantly over the forces of evil. By the crucifixion of Christ, God publicly deprived and destroyed their power. It was no *mere win*. It was utterly absolute and irrevocable. It stands for all time as the final and ultimate triumph of God “in Christ.” Therefore, don’t look for anything or anyone any better.

VIII Prohibitions because of Christ (2:16-23).

Vs. 16 opens with a prohibition in the present tense, imperative mood (*me krineto*) which demands that an action then in progress be stopped. I.e., “stop letting anyone pass judgment on you” by criticizing or condemning you with regard to several Jewish legalistic rituals which were regarded as acts for reconciling one to God:

- (1) “eating and drinking” – dietary rules and regulations which marked their Jewish identity (this issue was also addressed in Acts 10:14; 11:3; Gal. 2:1-14; 1 Cor. 8-10).
- (2) “a festival day” – *heorte* is a Jewish annual feast or observance, such as Passover or Tabernacles. This is the only time Paul uses the word.¹²
- (3) “a new moon” – *voumenia* is found only here in the NT (cp. Gal. 4:10 and *men*) and is a Jewish observance for the beginning of the month, associated with life, happiness, and fruitfulness, carrying religious significance. The moon was regarded by some as a goddess.
- (4) “Sabbath days” – a Jewish weekly observance which differentiated Jews from Gentiles. Thus, Paul reminds them that have been liberated from observing all Jewish religious necessities (1 Chronicles 23:31; 2 Chronicles 31:3; Nehemiah 10:33; Isaiah 1:13-14).

Vs. 17 begins with a plural pronoun which typically requires a plural verb. Here, how-

¹² It is found in Mt 26:5; 27:15; Mk. 14:2; 15:6; Lk. 2:41, 42; 22:1; 23:17; Jn. 2:23; 4:45 (twice); 5:1; 6:4; 7:2, 8 (twice), 10, 11, 14, 37; 11:56; 12:12, 20; 13:1, 29; Acts 18:21.

ever, a third person singular verb is used (*estin*) because the ritual ceremonies in v. 17 are viewed as a whole and thus, “which is.” They are collectively referred to as only a *skia* = a “shadow”¹³ which reveals something else. A shadow, within itself, of course, has no substance. However, it is a reflected image which is cast by something else which does have substance. From an analogous perspective, the noted OT ritualistic system was to God what a shadow is to man: a mere resemblance of something greater. In other words, these outward observances only suggested the reality of something – or in this case, Someone – greater. Failure to accurately and adequately grasp the difference between a mere shadow and the substance which creates the shadow is to sink into psychosis: a world of unreality.

Paul clarifies by adding: *ton mellonton*, “what was coming.” That is, with the coming of Christ in the NT era. In fact, he elaborates further: “even the body of Christ” – the ultimate substance. In the coming of Christ in the body of Jesus of Nazareth, substance has given way to the shadow. Since He has come, the symbolic shadow is no longer needed. The realities of God are visibly seen in the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and continuing intercessions by Jesus in our behalf at the right hand of God in heaven. How vain, empty, foolish, worthless, and useless to focus on the shadow as if it was the reality which it projects. We are prohibited from doing so.

Another prohibition in the present tense, imperative mood opens v. 18 and demands that action then in progress be stopped: *medeis humas katabrabeueto*, “Stop letting anyone give judgment against you.” This is the only time in the NT where the word *katabrabeuo* occurs. It means “to rule against, cheat, deprive of, disqualify,” implying a sense of condemnatory judgment. The word is composed of two other words: *kata*, “against, over, down upon,” and *Brabeuo*, “act as judge, umpire, rule, to award prizes,” and is found only in Col. 3:15. [*Brabeion* is the word for “prize,” and occurs in 1 Cor. 9:24 and Phil. 3:14]. So, by combining these two words, a prohibition against allowing anyone to defraud or deprive you of something desirable is unmistakable.

As to what the judgment entails or how it manifests itself is seen in the following expressions: *thelon en tapeinophrosune kai threskeia ton aggelon*, “being arrogantly delightful in humility and worship of angels.” This false humility is connected with the worship of angels and thus represents a form of idolatry. The Gnostic teachers had taught that it was necessary for mediators to come between God and man. Angels may have served this role and, therefore, were elevated and adored as the means or medium by which to encounter God (cp. 2:8).

The prohibition would, therefore, read as follows: “Stop letting anyone, being arrogantly delightful in humility and worship of angels, rule against you and deprive you of the prize.”

To further expose the absurdity of the opponents and to strengthen the prohibition, Paul adds: *ha heoraken embateuon*, “taking one’s stand on things he has seen” – The word, *embateuon*, means “going into, embarking upon, taking a stand on.” The expression *ha*

¹³ This word occurs only 6 other times in the NT: Mt. 4:16; Mk. 4:32; Lk. 1:79; Acts 5:15; Heb. 8:5; 10:1.

heoraken, “things he has seen,” most naturally refers to the shadows (2:8, 16-17, 20-23) and/or other visionary experiences which are wrapped in rituals and not in their fulfillment in Christ.

As if to strengthen or drive home powerfully his point, Paul adds: *eike phusioumenos hupo tou noos tes sarkos autou*, “being vainly conceited or arrogant by his fleshly mind” – The false teachers were in a constant state of being puffed up with *eike*¹⁴ (empty, groundless, unreasonable) *phusioumenos*¹⁵ (conceit). The *nous*, “mind,” of course, is where humans think and is the primary medium through which communication with God takes place. To say that the “mind” is *tes sarkos auto*, “of his flesh,” denotes a physical or material substance – another slap in the face of the Gnostics. Recall 1:22 where Paul stressed that reconciliation took place “in the body of His flesh.”

Paul continues in v. 19 to point out how false teachings are an affront to Christ. Here he explains that the prohibition in v. 18 is actually rooted in *kai ou kraton ten kephalen*: “not seizing or holding firmly the head” – In other words, Christ was not of primary importance. He was not being held supremely above all others. Paul does not say that they had “no hold” on Him but that their grasp on Him had been loosened and He was simply placed in a long line of many other intermediary agents from God – no better, no worse, just *another one*.

Not to regard Christ as “the head” is more than dangerous – it is fatal. Paul has already referred to Him as such in 1:18 and 2:10 and to deny this is to deny His divinity. After all, the key truth which flows from this verse is the connection between the head and the rest of the body.¹⁶ This is true from both a physical and a spiritual sense. The human body, for example, grows when its various parts function properly in accordance with the central nervous system (brain in the head and spinal chord branching out from the head). Even so, the spiritual body (the Church) only grows and functions as it should because of the vital connection between Christ and His body. As Paul puts it: *ex hou pan to soma dia ton haphon kai sundesmon epichoregoumenon kai sumbibazomenon auxei ten auxesin tou theou*: “from Whom the whole body, by continuously being supported and held together by joints and binding ligaments, grows¹⁷ the growth¹⁸ of God.” As a point of reference only, and not to overextend the analogy, the mutual dependence and fullest, healthiest interactions of the Head and spiritual body is absolutely necessary for God to produce the kind of growth He Himself requires and provides. Since Christ Himself is the core of Christianity, and apart from Him it all falls apart, then failure to stress the wholeness and/or completeness of the connection between Him and His body would only lead to destruction of the union, mar the meaning of Christ’s Headship over the Church, and support the message of the false teachers and teachings against the God Who is being

¹⁴ A term found also in Mt. 5:22; Rom. 13:4; 1 Cor. 15:2; Gal. 3:4; 4:11.

¹⁵ A term only found also in 1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; and 13:4.

¹⁶ The Head-Body imagery which Paul uses here is also found in 1 Cor. 11 and Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23.

¹⁷ This verb, *auxo*, is also found in Acts 6:7; 7:17; 12:24; 19:20; 1 Cor. 3:6, 7; 2 Cor. 9:10; 10:15; Eph. 2:21; 4:15; Col. 1:10; 1 Pt. 2:2; 2 Pt. 3:18.

¹⁸ This noun is found only here and in Eph. 4:16.

attacked. Despite their claims to *wisdom*, “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with or before God” (1 Cor. 3:19).

Paul continues in the next four verses with his prohibitions because of being in union with Christ.

V. 20 opens with a first class conditional clause (*Ei*) which assumes reality and is thus translated “since you died with Christ away from the elements¹⁹ of the world.” “Since” would refer to their initial embrace of Christ and the beginning of their relationship with Him when they “died with Christ,” in a spiritual manner (cp. 2:11-12). This “death with Christ” is said to be “away from the elements of the world.” What “the elements of the world” are has already been mentioned in 2:8, 16 – religious rituals: all the weak, material, beggarly elements which worldly people use religiously to worship God and by which they claim to access God and come to know Him. It may also include by some linkage, “all that is in the world: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

Such a stark and startling reality begs the continuation of a “since” with a *then* “why, as living in the world are you obeying rules and regulations?” The verb translated “obeying rules and regulations,” *dogmatizesthe*, is found only here in the NT. The noun form of this word, *dogmasin*, however, does occur in vs. 14 of this chapter, as well as by Paul in Eph. 2:15. It is also used by Luke in Luke 2:1 and Acts 16:4; and 17:7. The English word, *dogma*, is derived from this Greek word and refers to “beliefs taught as true; any system of established principles and tenets; an opinion set forth as if it were the highest authority.” Such was true in the mindset of these false teachers.

Paul, then, in v. 21, gives three examples of these mere man-made material outward decrees: *Me hapsei mede geuse nedi thiges* – “handle not, neither taste nor touch,” all denoting the idea of ritualistic purity and ascetic practices. The mindset which these rituals reveals is that Christ Himself is not enough and must be compensated for by such religious behaviors.

Vs. 22 counters that mindset by stating *ha estin panta eis phthoran te apochresei* - “which every kind of is perishable in the process of being used.” Note several features: *ha*, “which,” of course, refers back to the three examples of mere outward decrees. *panta* may be accurately translated by a number of words: “all, each, every, full, every kind of, etc.” In order to fit the 3rd person singular verb *estin*, however, it is best to translate it, “every kind of.” To translate “all” would require the plural verb, *are*, and that is simply not the case here. Thus by translating, “every kind of,” Paul is referring to each and every single instance of a man-made ritualistic practice.

Furthermore, he states that each one or every kind of such rituals “is perishable in the process of being used.” In other words, they are only material things and material things tend to either decay and decompose or, in the case of being eaten, are consumed.

¹⁹ Outside of this passage and in 2:8, the word *stoicheion* is used by Paul only in Gal. 4:3, 9. It also occurs, however, in Heb. 5:12 and 2 Pt. 3:10, 12.

Te apochresei, “in the process of being used,” occurs only here in the NT, and reinforces their temporal rather than eternal orientation: after being used, they are used up.

To strengthen his prohibition, he provides the additional clarification that they are *kata ta entalmata kai didaskalias ton anthropon*, “according to or in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men” – I.e., everything the false teachers say and do is in full agreement with man-made, human rules, regulations, knowledge, information, ideas, ideals, and directions which are self-serving. God’s revelation is either ignored or relegated to a subordinate position which deserves to be abandoned and discarded (cp. 2:8).

Verse 23 delivers the final power-punch angle to the prohibition: *hatina estin logon men echonta sophias en ethelothreskia kai tapeinophrosune kai apheidia somatos* – “which (commandments and teachings collectively) is, indeed, an habitual assertion of wisdom in self-made religion and humility [and] severe discipline of the body” – Here *logos* indicates an assertion or statement that is reputedly filled with “wisdom” which manifests itself in three areas: (1) *ethelothreskeia*, “self-made religion” – this is the only occurrence of this word in the NT and denotes a religion that is man-made, not God-revealed or initiated; (2) *tapeinophrosune*, “humility” – humility that is false because it is centered in one’s own prideful creation; (3) *apheidia somatos*, “severe discipline of the body” – *apheidia* occurs only here in the NT and refers to unusual and extreme self-denial, even to the point of whipping and beating of the body – with prideful, self-exalting consequences.

Thus, all is done *ouk en time tini pros plesmonen tes sarkos* - “with no honor or value to anyone except with a view to satisfying physical passions” – *plesmonen* is found only here in the NT and refers to things which only satisfy fleshly desires. In other words, no matter how socio-emotionally desirable these religious routines may appear to be as an indication of wisdom, they do not contribute in any valuable, honorable way to Godly, spiritual wisdom. In fact, they only do the opposite. Thus, the prohibitions in verses 16-23 are more than justified.

Paul now turns his attention in a more positive direction to assist and motivate his readers, then and now, to wholeheartedly pursue Christ – the Core of Christianity.

IX Prescription for Christian Living (3:1-4:1)

A. Foundation for Victory (3:1-4)

“Therefore” serves to gather everything that has been previously said about the significance of Christ; a sort of *in light of it all*.

The word “if” does not denote doubt or hesitancy. It is a first class conditional word which indicates *reality* and means “since.” In other words, “since you were raised up together with Christ,” you are in union with Him. That is, in His death

we too died to sin and in His resurrection we too were raised to walk in newness of life. Therefore, in Him, we are on that strong and stable foundation which enables us to obey or carry out the sixteen ethical commands which will be stated in ch. 3. These commands are not options for a more spiritual life – they are the bedrock or basis for a normal Christian life.

The first foundational command for victory is in the present tense: “keep on seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”

We are commanded to *keep on* seeking heavenly (not earthly) values, behaviors, and attitudes which reflect our relationship with Christ in the crux of daily living. This would include love, sacrifice, service to others in need, humility, communion with God, and the laying up heavenly treasures (cp. Mt. 6:19-21). This, of course, is what Jesus Himself said to do in Mt. 6:33: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” We are to keep on looking for what pleases Him. In other words, let your orientation toward life be Christ-centered. This must be done on a continual basis because, after failures, frustrations, and various forms of defeat and setbacks, it would be easy to become fainthearted and throw in the towel. So, we are commanded to be constantly diligent on a daily basis so that all of life will mirror Him. As Paul it elsewhere, “whether, therefore, ye eat or drink or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). After all, to be “in Christ” and to have Him “in us,” gives us the power on earth which He Himself possesses at God’s right hand in heaven.

The second foundational command for victory is also in the present tense: “keep on setting your mind on the things above, not on the things upon the earth.”

Emphasis here is on how we think or use our minds in a *settled manner* versus a flip-flop, wavering, fluctuating mentality. In other words, we are not to be double-minded, filling our minds with earthly endeavors and passions one moment, and then passionately pursuing heavenly endeavors and passions the next moment. We are human beings temporarily planted on this earth and we cannot help but focus on earthly matters to be responsible Christian-citizens. However, earthly concerns must not dictate our primary purpose, aim, or efforts in life. Thus, the first command may apply to the intentions of our hearts, while this one applies to the inroads of our minds.

There are no new commands in verses 3 and 4. Rather, Paul elaborates further on the meaning of this new orientation to life which he touched on in 2:20. Here he states, “you died,” but does not include the words “with Christ,” although the meaning is the same. Death is that inevitable intruder which dissolves or ends our connection with others on earth, as well as any responsibilities life handed us. So, at conversion, that *death-with-Christ* reality involved death to the elements or principles by which the world without God operates (“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” – 1 Jn. 2:15-17, as well as the need to follow human schemes and traditions as a way to connect with God). But it also involved death to sin as one’s master or controlling force, death to the condemnation of the law, and death to one’s self as the centerpiece of existence.

However, this *death-with-Christ* reality actually gave way to “your new life which is hidden with Christ in God.” This “new life,” of course, springs from and is in connection with the *resurrection-with-Christ* reality (cp. 2:12-13). It is a “new life” which is “hidden with Christ in God,” which *hiddenness* Paul mentions here as a verb (*krupto*). He also uses a variant of this word in 1:26-27 as a verb (*apokrupto* – cp. 1 Cor. 2:7 and Eph. 3:9) and in 2:3 as a noun (*apokruphos*). The word means that the significance of “new life” in Christ cannot be understood by those who have never experienced it; to them, it appears as meaningless foolishness since it is concealed from their consciousness. Paul put it this way in another section of his writings: “*But if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those who are lost or perishing, in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not to keep them from seeing the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, Who is the image of God*” (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

However, the significance of this *hidden-to-unbelievers* kind of life will remain as such (heavenly not earthly, spiritual not sensual or material) only until Christ returns: “*When Christ, who is your life, may be revealed, then you also will be revealed together with Him in glory.*” This new life is not only “with Christ” but also “is” Christ. This is consistent with what Paul says in 2 Cor. 4:10-11, Gal. 2:20, Philippians 1:21, and what John says in 1 Jn. 5:11,12. Christ Himself is the essence of this new life and apart from Him, new life is not to be found – despite ascetic practices, religious ceremonies which perish with the using (2:22), and any and all earthly principles or elements by which life on earth is measured.

So, significant is this new life “with Christ,” and which “is” Christ, that when He is once again “manifested or revealed,” those who constitute His body on this earth “*will also be revealed together with Him in glory.*” There is such an intimate, essential, inherent connection or relationship between Christ and His people that what happens to One will also happen to the others (cp. 1 Jn. 3:2; Rom. 8:17). “Glory” refers to the manifestation of God’s reality and presence. The particular, specific manifestation Paul is here referring to is His second coming.

In these 4 verses, therefore, Paul brings together the past, the present, and the future: “raised with Christ” (past) – “hidden with Christ in God” (present) – “revealed with Christ” (future). This foundation for victory is the basis for resisting any devaluation of Christ and looking for anyone or anything which supplants, displaces or replaces Him. It also provides motivation for wholeheartedly forsaking earthly vices which betray Him and them. So, interconnected is the relationship between Christ and His followers that to do otherwise would only lend support to the false teachers that Christ is actually inferior to what they are teaching.

B. Forsake Earthly Vices (3:5-11)

These verses contain three commands or imperatives, two of which are in the aorist tense which denotes action to be undertaken at once: “put to death” (v. 5) and “put away or aside” (v. 8). The other imperative is in the present tense and means that an action then in progress is to be ended: “stop lying” or “do not make a habit of lying.” The meaning of these imperatives in their relation to *forsaking earthly vices* will now be unfolded.

The word *nekroo*, “put to death,” is found only here and Rom. 4:19 and Heb. 11:12 in the NT. Here Paul commands an attitude of viewing “*the members that are upon the earth*,” that is, the various members of our earthly bodies, as dead or useless when it comes to carrying out earthly vices. The members of our bodies are part of “the things upon the earth” which he already prohibited in v. 2 and do not reflect “being dead and raised with Christ” and the new life He gives. He is about to specify those vices which should only be forsaken and viewed as worthy of being put to death. This only makes sense since the outworking or development of the new life requires daily discipline in overcoming old habits and weaknesses with which Christians often still struggle. In other words, by viewing the various members or parts of our bodies as instruments for good and godliness, they should be viewed as not employable for bad and wickedness. He now specifies what five examples of those earthly vices are which damage oneself:

porneian – This is where we get the English word *pornography* (“writings of sexual immorality or prostitution”) and includes all types of illegal or illegitimate sexual practices.²⁰

akatharsian – This refers to impure, wicked, savage-like sexual practices.²¹

pathos – This refers to lustful, dishonorable, reckless passion or affection.²²

epithumia – This refers to the seedbed out of which mostly bad fleshly desires emerge, though occasionally good desires.²³

kaken – This refers to wrong, evil, bad, moral corruption.²⁴

ten pleonexian hetis estin idololatria – This refers to “the greed which is idolatry,” and means the unending covetous desire for more; discontent or dissatisfaction without additional accumulation of vices (sexual and otherwise).

²⁰ This word is also found in Mt. 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Mk. 7:21; Jn. 8:41; Ac. 15:20, 29; 21:25; Ro. 1:29; 1 C. 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Co. 12:21; Ga. 5:19; Ep. 5:3; 1 Th. 4:3; Re. 2:21; 9:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2.

²¹ This word is also found in Mt. 23:27; Ro. 1:24; 6:19; 2 Co. 12:21; Ga. 5:19; Ep. 4:19; 5:3; 1 Th. 2:3; 4:7.

²² This word is also found in Ro. 1:26 and 1 Th. 4:5.

²³ This word is also found in Mk. 4:19; Lk. 22:15; Jn. 8:44; Ro. 1:24; 6:12; 7:7, 8; 13:14; Ga. 5:16, 24; Ep. 2:3; 4:22; Ph. 1:23; 1 Th. 2:17; 4:5; 1 Ti. 6:9; 2 Ti. 2:22; 3:6; 4:3; Ti. 2:12; 3:3; Ja. 1:14, 15; 1 Pt. 1:14; 2:11; 4:2, 3; 2 Pt. 1:4; 2:10, 18; 3:3; 1 Jn. 2:16, 17; Ju. 16, 18; Re. 18:14.

²⁴ This word is also found in Mt. 21:41; 24:48; 27:23; Mk. 7:21; 15:14; Lk. 16:25; 23:22; Jn. 18:23; Ac. 9:13; 16:28; 23:9; 28:5; Ro. 1:30; 2:9; 3:8; 7:19, 21; 9:11; 12:17, 21; 13:3, 4, 10; 14:20; 16:19; 1 Co. 10:6; 13:5; 15:33; 2 Co. 5:10; 13:7; Ph. 3:2; 1 Th. 5:15; 1 Ti. 6:10; 2 Ti. 4:14; Ti. 1:12; He. 5:14; Ja. 1:13; 3:8; 1 Pt. 3:9, 10, 11, 12; 3 Jo. 11; Re. 2:2; 16:2.

This greed²⁵ is called “idolatry”²⁶ because it is a consuming, all-embracing, constant, passionate *self-centered* longing which serves as one’s personal god, thus making it a forbidden object of worship.

Verse 6 notes that such attitudes and actions bring about, on a continual basis (Present tense verb – *erchetai*: “is coming”), God’s wrathful opposition or judgment. Such judgment is seen as He turns people over to experience the corruptible consequences of their conduct (cp. Rom. 1:18). In other words, when God’s love, mercy, and grace are ignored or viewed with complacency and/or entitlement, His wrath against such sins is inevitable “upon the sons of disobedience” (cp. Eph. 5:6) – that is, only those who disobey God are those who practice such evils and thereby destroy their object of worship: *themselves*!

Paul reminds them that, in the past, these evils were among their former patterns of behavior: “in which you also formerly walked, when you used to live in them.” His point, of course, is that, despite various temptations which may knock on their door, do not answer and revisit them – may sure the past remains the past.

In fact, he says in v. 8, “But now” – as opposed to “formerly” - and issues his second command or imperative in v. 8 to “throw off, take off, be done with, or rid themselves of” five other behavioral practices which are in conflict with the new life in Christ and which damage other people:

orge – “wrath, anger, indignation, vengeance, ongoing or habitual anger”²⁷

thumon – “sudden anger which is violent or explosive when expressed; an anger so strong, wild, or fierce that one loses control and intends to do harm or destroy whatever or whomever is in the way; furious rage which motives one to injure another”²⁸

kakian – “an habitual mindset of evil or wickedness; a mean, malicious spirit with an aim or desire to make others suffer; spitefulness”²⁹

blasphemian – “slander, revile, violent and reproachful language against or to another, character assassination”³⁰

²⁵ This word is also found in Mk. 7:22; Lu. 12:15; Ro. 1:29; 2 Co. 9:5; Ep. 4:19; 5:3; 1 Th. 2:5; 2 Pt. 2:3, 14.

²⁶ This word is also found in 1 Co. 10:14; Ga. 5:20; 1 Pt. 4:3. A similar word, *eidololatres*, is found in 1 Co. 5:10, 11; 6:9; 10:7; Ep. 5:5; Re. 21:8; 22:15. The word for “idols,” *eidolon*, is found in Ac. 7:41; 15:20; Ro. 2:22; 1 Co. 8:4, 7; 10:19; 12:2; 2 Co. 6:16; 1 Th. 1:9; 1 Jo. 5:21; Re. 9:20.

²⁷ This word is also found in Mt. 3:7; Mk. 3:5; Lu. 3:7; 21:23; Jo. 3:36; Ro. 1:18; 2:5 (twice), 8; 3:5; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22 (twice); 12:19; 13:4, 5; Ep. 2:3; 4:31; 5:6; 1 Th. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9; 1 Ti. 2:8; He. 3:11; 4:3; Ja. 1:19, 20; Re. 6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15.

²⁸ This word is also found in Lk. 4:28; Ac. 19:28; Ro. 2:8; 2 Co. 12:20; Ga. 5:20; Ep. 4:31; He. 11:27; Re. 12:12; 14:8, 10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 18:3; 19:15. The verb form of this word, *thumoomai*, is found only in Mt. 2:16.

²⁹ This word is also found in Mt. 6:34; Ac. 8:22; Ro. 1:29; 1 Co. 5:8; 14:20; Ep. 4:31; Ti. 3:3; Ja. 1:21; 1 Pt. 2:1, 16.

³⁰ This word is also found in Mt. 12:31 (twice); 15:19; 26:65; Mk. 2:7; 3:28; 7:22; 14:64; Lu. 5:21; Jo. 10:33; Ep. 4:31; 1 Ti. 6:4; Ju 9; Re. 2:9; 13:1, 5, 6; 17:3.

aischrologian ek tou stomatos humon – This is the only time *aischrologian* occurs in the NT and refers to “obscene speech, talk which is suggestive of evil.” This word is made up of *aischros* = “disgraceful, shameful, dishonest,” and *logos* = “word, something said, talk, conversation.” Thus, such evil talk which comes “out of your mouth” must be banished.

Verse 9 contains the third command or imperative in this section. It is a prohibitive in the present tense and demands that an action then in progress be stopped: *me pseudesthe eis allelous* – “stop lying to one another or don’t keep telling lies to one another [like you used to do].”

Lies which are constantly told may eventually come to be regarded *as truth*. They also represent inaccurate information which may harm oneself or others and should not be the rule of thumb in conducting one’s life. Trust or confidence in interpersonal relationships cannot be attained or maintained when lying or avoiding truthfulness is uppermost or commonplace.³¹

Paul’s basis or reasons for singling out this particular vice with a specific prohibitive command are two-fold: (1) “since you have put off the old man with its practices” – one of which was lying – and in verse 10, (2) “since you have put on the new man which is presently being remade (renewed or refreshed) into fuller knowledge in accordance with the likeness of the One Who created him.”

In Ephesians 4:24, Paul uses the same verb he uses here (*enduo*) about putting on “the new man which has been created corresponding to God in righteousness and holiness *of the truth*” – as opposed to lies; in other words, what is in accordance with God’s nature and being. Cp. his earlier comments in 2:11 along these same lines of thought.

The word for “image” of God, *eikon*, means His likeness and is also found in Ro. 1:23; 8:29; 1 Co. 11:7; 15:49 (twice), and 2 Co. 3:18; 4:4. This ongoing process of “being remade into fuller knowledge” to be more God-like requires time, patience, discipline, diligence, and realistic expectations: it is gradual – not instant; it is progressive – not perfect. After all, it is not geared or oriented toward “knowledge” (*gnosis*) but “fuller knowledge” (*epignosis*)³² which will not be fulfilled or achieved until *the heavenly graduation ceremony* (1 Jo. 3:2).

Verse 11 closes the section on forsaking earthly vices by emphasizing that all kinds of distinctions (religious, intellectual, and social) created by man do not exist in Christ and in the new man who has been created by God in Christ and the fuller knowledge which accompanies that new creation: “there is no” -
Religious distinction:

³¹ Paul insists upon truthfulness which guides his own life in Ro. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:31; Ga. 1:20; 1 Ti. 2:7.

³² Paul refers to this *epignosis* in Ro. 1:28; 3:20; 10:2; Ep. 1:17; 4:13; Ph. 1:9; Co. 1:9, 10; 2:2; 1 Ti. 2:4; 2 Ti. 2:25; 3:7; Ti. 1:1; Ph. 6. The word is also found in He. 10:26; 2 Pt. 1:2, 3, 8; 2:20.

***“Greek and Jew” – In the other three pairings of these terms (Ro. 1:16; 10:12; Ga. 3:28), this is the only time that “Greek” comes first. “Greek” denotes a culturally educated person, while “Jew” indicates one who is totally identified by his religion.

***“circumcision and uncircumcision” – another religious distinction to pit one person or group of persons from others.

Intellectual distinction:

***“Barbarians, Scythian” – “Barbarians” could not speak Greek and were basically incapable of intelligent conversations, thus uncivilized.³³

“Scythians” were regarded as the apex of barbarians with a rude, savage-like, cruel nature. This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT.

Social distinction:

***“slave, free” – “Slaves” were common during this time, as was the case with “Onesimus,” the carrier of this letter (4:9; Philemon 15). They were typically looked down upon by people who were “free” or not slaves.

With a strong adversative conjunctions, *alla*, Paul boldly declares that “Christ is all and in all.” As such, Christ Himself is the One Who obliterates these distinctions. After all, to be a new man, as a result of being in Christ, everyone should be regarded with equal value and worthiness. To say that “Christ is all” means that He is the source, the substance, and the standard of life, and everything and everyone should be viewed in light of Him. To say that “Christ is in all” speaks of His supremacy, and everything and everyone can only find unity by virtue of Him. Cp. earlier comments in Colossians (1:16; 2:9, 10, 15) behind which and upon which these pronounced truths in vs. 11 are but an abbreviated, yet all-encompassing, utterly significant echo.

C. Follow Every Virtue (3:12-17)

These verses contain four commands or imperatives – one in the aorist tense which means to do at once (“put on”), while three in the present tense call for an action in progress to continue as such (“let rule,” “be thankful,” and “let live”). The specific meanings of these imperatives in relation to *following every virtue* will now be unfolded.

“Therefore,” – in view of what has been said in the previous verses, as well as the identity Paul now clearly specifies: “as elect of God, holy and beloved.” In other words, the basis for the forthcoming command is surrounded with truths which qualify them to obey or which enables them to obey: they are God’s *elect* (He

³³ This word is also found in Ac. 28:2, 4; Ro. 1:14; 14:11 (twice).

chose them as His own), God's *holy ones* (set apart by Him and for Him), God's *beloved* (a perfect tense, passive participle denoting that they are the objects of His love).

So, "therefore," in light of these truths, you can now obey the following command: "put on or clothe yourselves" with the following virtues:

*splagchna oiktirmou*³⁴ – "a love-based heart of deeply felt compassion"

*chrestoteta*³⁵ – "kindness, goodness, what is right" in interpersonal relationships

*tapeinophrosunen*³⁶ – "humility, not vain, decent, moderate, sober-minded, sensible, reasonable"

*prauteta*³⁷ – "meekness, courtesy, considerateness for the rights of others, absence of rudeness"

*makrothumian*³⁸ – "patience, patient endurance, long-suffering, no revenge or resentment or retaliation"

Verse 13 continues itemizing virtues to appropriate:

To demonstrate these virtues in the midst of various forms of maltreatment and poisonous pathways reveals that one is *a new man in Christ*, and has *forsaken earthly vices* (3:5-11).

The present middle participle ("bearing with, enduring, putting up with, tolerating") indicates simultaneously action relative to the main verb of command to "put on." In other words, this endurance or toleration of others is one way by which we "put on" God-required virtues.

Another simultaneous action which manifests the *new man in Christ* is seen in another present middle participle: "forgiving each other if anyone has complaint³⁹ against another." What that means is seen in the next phrase: "just as the Lord also forgave you, so you also." The Lord forgave us by suffering the consequences of our wrongs against Him, and did so without becoming embittered about it. So, in that same manner, we too must suffer wrongs or complaints from others without any intentions of getting even with them. Simply put, the Lord's

³⁴ This word, *oiktirmos*, is also found in Ro. 12:1; 2 Co. 1:3; Ph. 2:1, and He. 10:28.

³⁵ This word is also found in Ro. 2:4; 3:12; 11:22 (twice); 2 Co. 6:6; Ga. 5:22; Ep. 2:7; and Ti. 3:4.

³⁶ This word is also found in Ac. 20:19; Ep. 4:2; Ph. 2:3; Co. 2:18, 23; 1 Pt. 5:5.

³⁷ This word is also found in 1 Co. 4:21; 2 Co. 10:1; Ga. 5:23; 6:1; Ep. 4:2; 1 Ti. 6:11; 2 Ti. 2:25; Ti. 3:2.

³⁸ This word is also found in Ro. 2:4; 9:22; 2 Co. 6:6; Ga. 5:22; Ep. 4:2; Co. 1:11; 1 Ti. 1:16; 2 Ti. 3:10; 4:2; He. 6:12; Ja. 5:10; 1 Pt. 3:20; 2 Pt. 3:15.

³⁹ This is the only place in the NT where the word, *momphe*, "complaint, quarrel" occurs.

forgiveness of our wrongs/sins is made the basis or reason for our forgiving others.

Surely, the recognition that all sin and are in mutual need of forgiveness by God and others is a reality without room for debate. Only by the continual interplay between *rendering* and *receiving* forgiveness can *the new man in Christ* be seen or identified (cp. Mt. 6:12, 14-15; 18:23-35). After all, the words *allelon*, “one another, each other,” and *heautois*, “each other,” stress the interconnectedness between them all (fellow-members of one another) in the body of Christ.

To top off the noted virtues with absolute selflessness and sacrificial concern for the good and/or welfare of others, Paul adds, “and upon all these things the love” [which makes all the other virtues significant and] which is [therefore] what binds them all together with completeness.”⁴⁰ To designate love as *sundesmos*⁴¹ highlights its essential role in making conduct *Christian* rather than merely positive, decent behaviors for selfish reasons which are devoid of love. It is *ten agapen*, the God-kind of love, which makes all other virtues hold together in such a way that only God Himself may be credited for *their* powerful presence in this life. Furthermore, God is thereby *glorified* - *His* presence is also thus made known to others.

The second imperative in this section is a present tense verb in v. 15: *brabeueto*⁴² which means (1) to award prizes in a contest, and (2) to be a judge, to make decisions, to rule or control. Paul is saying that “the peace of Christ” (the peace which He gives; the peace which only comes from Him) is to be the constant judge or decision-maker “in your hearts” for all matters of conduct. No behavioral choices one makes should dilute, aggravate, or disrupt that peace. By following the specified virtues above, this peace will prevail.

After all, it was “into which [peace] ye were called [plural: all of you as interconnected members] in one body [“as elect of God, holy and beloved” – without distinctions of any kind (v.11)]. Therefore, Paul issues the next imperative or command in this section, a present tense verb to: “*be constantly practicing* thankfulness.” The word for “thankfulness,” *eucharistoi*, is made up of two words: *eu*, which means “good, well, splendid,” and *charis*, which means “grace, favor, a special manifestation of God’s presence, gratitude, graciousness.” Therefore, it is obligatory for the people of God to always live in an atmosphere or attitude characterized by constant, continuous gratitude to Him.

The next and last command or imperative in this section of appropriate virtues is another present tense verb in the next verse: “The word of Christ *must live* in you richly” – This is the only occurrence of the expression, “the word of Christ,” in

⁴⁰ This abbreviated statement summarizes what Paul has said at large about *love* in 1 Co. 13.

⁴¹ This word is also used by Paul earlier in this letter (2:19) and in Ep. 4:3. It is used by Luke in a negatively binding way or manner in Ac. 8:23: “the bond of iniquity, a bundle of crookedness” (Williams), “chained by wickedness” (Beck).

⁴² This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT, although its derivative, *katababeueto*, is found in 2:18.

the NT and refers to the good news which He uttered and utters in the Gospel narratives, and which those who preach His Word and words continue to utter. As these words are anchored in the hearts and minds of His followers, they provide inward motives for outward manifestations of Christ Himself, especially the virtues in these verses.

The word translated “richly or in full measure,” *plousios*,⁴³ denotes *abundantly* and without room for anything less than the best God has to offer. The resources within His word cannot be exhausted, cannot be deprived of mental and spiritual information or stimulation, and are forever revealing needs, insights, and discoveries which are geared toward helping people “live” as fully in life as possible and in concert with the will of God.

One way by which that richness is to manifest itself is now noted with two co-ordinate participles: “teaching⁴⁴ and admonishing⁴⁵ one another” - Paul uses these same two words together for the first time in this letter in 1:28. He uses the word “teaching” for the first time in this letter in 2:7. Taken together, they indicate how “the Word of Christ” is to “live in them richly in all wisdom”: all they need to know is stored in scripture – not vain, empty, and deceitful philosophy.

He continues to specify *where* and *how* the “teaching and admonishing one another with appropriate warnings” is located: “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

*Psalmos*⁴⁶ – “Psalms” – This noun is derived from the verb, *psallo*, which means “to sing praises to God and to do so by touching or plucking the strings of a stringed instrument; to play the flute.” [Hello, my Church of Christ friends!] The verb is found in Ro. 15:9; 1 Co. 14:15 (twice), Ep. 5:19, and Ja. 5:13.

Humnois – “hymns” - This word only occurs here and Ep. 5:19 and does so as one of three means to praise and worship God. It comes from the word, *hudeo*, which means “to celebrate.”

Odais pneumatikais – “spiritual songs” – As the word “spiritual” denotes, this refers to inspired songs which are the modes by which the Word of Christ is heard. These are not songs by an individual but are used exclusively by the collective or gathered community of believers in worship.

⁴³ This word is an adverb and is also found in 1 Ti. 6:17, Ti. 3:6, and 2 Pt. 1:11.

⁴⁴ Paul uses this word, *didasko*, elsewhere in Ro. 2:21 (twice), 12:7; 1 Co. 4:17; 11:14; Ga. 1:12; Ep. 4:21; 2 Th. 2:15; 1 Ti. 2:12; 4:11; 6:2; 2 Ti. 2:2; Ti. 1:11. It also occurs in He. 5:12; 8:11; 1 Jo. 2:27 (three times), Re. 2:14, 20.

⁴⁵ This word, *noutheteo*, is used by Luke in Ac. 20:31 and by Paul in Ro. 15:14; 1 Co. 4:14; 1 Th. 5:12, 14; 2 Th. 3:15.

⁴⁶ This word is used by Luke in Lu. 20:42; 24:44; Ac. 1:20; 13:33; and Paul in 1 Co. 14:26 and Ep. 5:19.

This *singing-playing-celebration* is done “in grace,” that is, in connection with the grace which God makes available and is the motivation behind such worship. That such worship is to be done “in your hearts to God,” means that it is to be a genuine, heartfelt *experience of* and *expression to* God – not just a mere routine before passive participants in a religious-entertainment atmosphere.

Paul rounds out this section (*Follow Every Virtue*) with a significant summary statement: *kai pan ho ti ean poitete* – an idiom which means “whatever you do” - “in word or in work” – **which includes all of life or the entire scope of one’s earthly pathways** – “[do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus”: To do something *in the name* of someone stands for the character and authority which that person possesses. Thus, in this case, in the realm of the character and authority of none other than “the Lord Jesus,” about Whom and around Whom this letter was built or arranged. He is, indeed, the Core of Christianity.

The realization of the all-sufficiency of what God has done in Christ alone, triggers intermittent notes of “thanksgiving”⁴⁷ throughout this letter:
1:3 (verb: *eucharisteo*) – 1:12 (verb: *eucharisteo*) - 2:7 (noun: *eucharistia*) – 3:17 (verb: *eucharisteo*) – 4:2 (noun: *eucharistia*)

Again, to underscore the utter significance of Christ, Paul exclaims that this worship through “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” and the “thanksgiving” behind them, is only acceptable to God “through Him.”

D. Family Values (3:18-4:1)

There are more commands or imperatives in this section than in the previous ones – nine, in fact. The moral or ethical directives in this section of the *prescription for Christian living* relate to the home. Within these nine verses, references to *the Lord* are found seven times, giving a decisive **Christian** orientation: “in the Lord” (v. 18) – “to the Lord” (cv. 20) – “fearing the Lord” (v. 22) – “for the Lord” (v. 23) – “from the Lord” (v. 24) – “serve the Lord” (v.24) – “Lord in heaven” (4:1).

The first directive is a present tense imperative in the middle voice which emphasizes continuous, voluntary submission on the part of “the wives” to “the husbands” – that is, their own husbands, not all men in general. This “subjection, submission” does not denote slavery or relegation to a subordinate position of inferiority. Rather, it calls for wives to have respectful recognition of divinely-ordained order within the family unit in which the husband bears tremendous primary responsibility to provide loving leadership. The phrase, “as is fitting in the Lord,” highlights and underscores the utter significance of this truth. This succinct statement is in step with Paul’s ex-

⁴⁷ Paul’s practice of “thanksgiving” is reflected elsewhere in his letters: *eucharisteo* in Ro. 1:8, 21; 7:25; 14:6 (twice); 16:4; 1 Co. 1:4, 14; 10:30; 11:24; 14:17, 18; 2 Co. 1:11; Ep. 1:16; 5:20; Ph. 1:3; 1 Th. 1:2; 2:13; 5:18; 2 Th. 1:3; 2:13; Ph. 4. . . . *eucharistia* in 1 Co. 14:16; 2 Co. 4:15; 9:11, 12; Ep. 5:4; Ph. 4:6; 1 Th. 3:9; 1 Ti. 2:1; 4:3, 4.

panded perspective in Ep. 5:22-23, 25: “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself the Savior of the body. . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” No wife who is loved with the same caliber of love which Christ has for the church (sacrificially, selflessly) will resent or fail to comply with this ethical directive in Colossians and its elaborative expansion in Ephesians.

The second and third directives in v. 19 are also in the present tense imperative denoting continuous actions. The command for husbands to “love their wives,” however, is in the *active* voice – a call for husbands to take concerted and consistent responsibility for their own actions to so love their wives. The kind of love here advocated is not some commodity which may be bought or sold on the market. It cannot be forced upon someone or even from someone. Love is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person. Love reveals itself when meeting the various needs (physical, emotional, etc.) of some other person becomes an unrelenting need of my own. It is a learned and ever-learning response to others.

The third imperative, however, is in the *passive* voice - “stop *being bitter*”⁴⁸ to them.” This prohibitive indicates that an on-going action then in progress come to an end. Apparently, some degree of problematic recognition of the nature of their relations existed. Perhaps, there was a tendency on the part of husbands to be embittered toward or harshly treat their wives as inferior. Perhaps, this tendency was due to a sense of distorted dominance on the part of the husbands. Regardless of its nature, it is to be terminated.

The fourth imperative in v. 20 is another present tense which calls upon “children to demonstrate continuous obedience to your parents in all things.” The word for “obedience,” *hupakouete*,⁴⁹ is composed of two words: *hupo* (“under”) and *akouo* (“I hear”). It denotes hearing under parental authority with the intent to heed or obey the directions they give. Since this is said to be *euaireston*⁵⁰ *en kurio* “acceptable, pleasing in the Lord,” it is also imperative, by way of implication, that the parents demonstrate directions for and demands upon the children which are age-appropriate, consistent with developmental skills and abilities, sensible, rational, and which reflect His will as revealed in His Word.

V. 21 contains the fifth command or imperative, another present tense in the prohibitive which is directed specifically to “fathers”: *me erethizete*⁵¹ *ta tekna humon* – “stop exasperating, making resentful or embittered, stirring up [in a bad way], provoking your children.” Fathers especially, though not all mothers are

⁴⁸The word, *pikraino*, means “to throw pointed arrows toward, to cast careless sternness or severity toward, to be indignant toward, to be annoyed or provoked to anger by minor concerns, to express irritation and exasperation toward, persistent or chronic faultfinding” This word is found in the NT only here and in Re. 8:11; 10:9, 10.

⁴⁹ This is the same word used by Paul in Ep. 6:1, 5; Ph. 2:12, and in v. 22 of this chapter.

⁵⁰ This word is also found in Ro. 12:1, 2; 14:18; 2 Co. 5:9; Ep. 5:10; Ph. 4:18; Ti. 2:9; He. 13:21.

⁵¹ This word is found only one other time in the NT and in a positive way: 2 Co. 9:2.

exempt from such overwhelmingly inappropriate parenting, as the head of the home, may be much more likely to evoke anger or stimulate resentment over improper, inconsiderate, and even inappropriate complaining, irritation, conveying contempt and/or dislike for their children.

The reason given for this prohibition is clear: *hina ne athumosin* – “in order that they not be discouraged.” This is the only occurrence of this word in the NT. It refers to reaching the point of being disheartened, downhearted, giving up, losing the will to go on, hopelessness, and being aggravated to embarrassment and excessive stress. The consequences of such negative parenting may include low self-image, retributive plans for the future (parental abuse), homicides, suicide.

In. v. 22, the sixth command or imperative relates to “slaves”: *humpkouete kata panta tois kata sarka kuriois* – “obey or be subject to your earthly masters in all things.” Cp. Ep. 6:5. Slaves were regarded as an integral part of many of the households at this time and place and their responsibilities to their masters was no small matter. Even if, and especially if, the slaves were Christians, whether their masters were or not, their obligation to obey was imperative.

Such obedience was to be carried out *me en ophthalmoudoulia*⁵² – “not with eye service” – *hos anthro pareskoi*⁵³ – “as men-pleasers”: that is, not just going through the motions of appearing to be doing honest work only when their masters are looking, and with no higher motive than to just please them. That kind of obedience would only be a pretense; a masked form of actual selfishness.

all' – “rather” – *en haploteti kardias phoboumenoi ton kurion* – “in or with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.” The word, *haploteti*, means “single-hearted devotion, generosity, focused attention, simplicity, wholeheartedness.” The expression, “fearing the Lord,” is a present middle voice participle which denotes simultaneously action relative to the main verb “obey,” indicating the spirit in which this obedience is to be conducted. It also means out of respect for Him Whose eyes see all actions and all motives behind those actions, so as to be well-pleasing to Him - their true master. It may have been an appealing temptation for these slaves to think that since they now have a *heavenly Master*, what they do in relation to their *earthly masters* is only a small thing. If so, that is a bubble which Paul bursts with immediacy. In fact, he reinforces and expands this ideation in verses 23-25:

ho ean poiete – “whatever you may do”: Lest the Christian slaves face another temptation to wiggle and wobble, as if looking for an area or two in which such obedience might not apply, Paul tosses in this all-encompassing term, “whatever,” to disquiet any such thinking. Furthermore, the word “do” calls for positive action rather than mere passive acquiescence.

⁵² This word occurs in the NT only here and in Ep. 6:6.

⁵³ This word is also found in the NT only here and in Ep. 6:6.

The seventh command or imperative is another present tense verb with another middle voice calling for action in reference to some specific interest: *ergasthe* – “working” is synonymous with “do” and denotes the expenditure of energy *ek psuches*, “from the soul,” that is, out of one’s wholeness as a complete person or all of one’s being. There should be no division or split in awareness as to what and why the slaves work or do whatever they do.

This expenditure of energy, in fact, is to be done *hos to kurio kai ouk anthropois*, “as to the Lord and not to men.” This repeats what has already been said in v. 22 but with the intention to reinvigorate or give fresh persuasiveness by means of repetition.

Never short of providing a rationale for his thinking, Paul elaborates this “working” with a qualifying participle in the perfect tense which denotes antecedent action relative to the latest main verb of command in v. 22: “*since you know* that from the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance.” The word translated “reward,” *antapodosis*, is found only here in the NT and notes that the reward is the inheritance. This idea is first mentioned in 1:12. Paul expands this idea further in Ro. 4; 8:15-17; 1 Co. 6:9-10; 15:50; Ga. 3-4; 5:21; Ep. 5:5.

The eighth command or imperative in v. 24, another present tense which calls for continued action, fits perfectly as an emphatic conclusion to his statements to the slaves and also as a bridge to his closing statement in their behalf in v. 25: *to kurio Christo douleuete* – “continue to give service or be enslaved to the Lord Christ.” “Christ” is the true “Lord” or “Master” Who deserves all obedience and service.

Verse 25 provides the reason (*gar* – “since, for”) for the command in v.24: “the one doing wrong shall receive or be paid back what wrong he did” – *kai ouk estin prosopolempsia*⁵⁴: “and there is no favoritism or treating one person better than another.” Neither slaves nor masters can escape the consequences of perpetrated wrongs.

4:1 is included in the section on *Family Values* as it directs earthly “masters” in the treatment of their slaves. The ninth command or imperative in this section, *parecho*,⁵⁵ is a present tense, middle voice, which calls for continuous responsible action on the part of the masters: “give, grant, offer” *to dikaion*⁵⁶ *kai ten isoteta*⁵⁷ *tois doulois* – “to the slaves justice and fairness.” *Justice* refers to “what is right; proper; honest; innocent.” *Fairness* calls for “equality of treatment” which is

⁵⁴ This word is also found in Ro. 2:11; Ep. 6:9; Ja. 2:1. It is composed of two words: *prosopon* (“face”) and *lempsis* (“receiving”). God *receives the face* of no one.

⁵⁵ Paul uses this same word in Ga. 6:17; 1 Ti. 1:4; 6:17; Ti. 2:7. Luke uses this word in Lk. 6:29; 7:4; 11:7; 18:5; Ac. 16:16; 17:31; 19:24; 22:2; 28:2. It is also found in Mt. 26:10 and Mk. 14:6.

⁵⁶ This is the word for “just, righteous, right” which Paul uses in Ro. 1:17; 2:13; 3:10, 26; 5:7, 19; 7:12; Ga. 3:11; Ep. 6:1; Ph. 1:7; 4:8; 2 Th. 1:5, 6; 1 Ti. 1:9; 2 Ti. 4:8; Ti. 1:8. It is also the word from which “righteousness” is derived.

⁵⁷ This word is found only here and in 2 Co. 8:13-14.

based on the equality of all Christians (slaves and masters) and the love and grace which determines and dictates such treatment. The use of this term *isoteta* alongside *dikaion* says much about a “righteous” lifestyle.⁵⁸

The necessity of appropriate treatment of slaves by masters is reinforced by the reminder, *eidotes hoti kai humeis echete kurion in ourano* – “knowing that you also have a master in heaven.” Since He is the ultimate master who judges with “justice and fairness,” His criteria should be followed. It is an unwise master who treats his slaves in a manner that is inconsistent with how the Lord treats His Christian servants. After all, He is “in heaven,” from which divine dictates for behavior on earth originates.

E. Further Viewpoints (4:2-6)

In this section of scripture, two aspects or components of prayer are mentioned, as well as profitable behavior before non-Christians.

1. Prayer of Thanksgiving (4:2)

The pressures of life and the challenges they present come in many different shapes and sizes. The coping skills and/or resources by which such pressures are handled vary from person to person and, perhaps, even from time to time, depending on the exact nature of those challenges. Regardless of the particular pressures, however, there is one God-ordained *manner* by which all should be faced. It is available for rich or poor. It is not affected one way or another by one’s race. One’s socio-economic status is not impacted by it either. It has no time constraints on it, being available for appropriation night or day. It is so important that Paul here puts it in a present tense, imperative mood: *te proseuche proskartereite*⁵⁹ “continue steadfastly in prayer.”

Prayer signifies comprehensive (full, nothing omitted, inclusive, whole, broad-based: adoration, confession, intercession, petition, thanksgiving, etc.) communion with God and is to be a persistent, consistent, continual matter in the lives of those for whom Christ is Lord. Prayer is to be a reflection of one’s sincere love for God and determination to put God first in all phases of one’s life.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Compare Paul’s use of the word *dikaioi* and its cognates in my *Study Guide to Romans: Outlined with Sectional Summaries*.

⁵⁹ The word means “to devote oneself to prayer, to busy oneself with prayer, to spend much time in.” Paul also uses this word for prayer in Ro. 12:12. It is also used in relation to prayer in Ac. 1:14 and 6:4.

⁶⁰ Prayer is mentioned in the NT in the following places: Mt. 17:21; 21:13, 22; Mk. 9:29; 11:17; Lu. 6:12; 19:46; 22:45; Ac. 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4; 10:4, 31; 12:5; 16:13, 16; Ro. 1:10; 12:12; 15:30; 1 Co. 7:5; Ep. 1:16; 6:18; Ph. 4:6; Co. 4:2, 12; 1 Th. 1:2; 1 Ti. 2:1; 5:5; Phi. 4, 22; Ja. 5:17; 1 Pt. 3:7; 4:7; Re. 5:8; 8:3, 4.

By means of a present tense participle, *gregorountes en aute*, (“watching, being alert in it”) Paul indicates what kind of action is to accompany or occur during prayer: *en eucharistia*,⁶¹ “in thanksgiving.” Of all the components within comprehensive prayer mentioned earlier, only “thanksgiving” is here singled out. Without “thanksgiving,” prayer may only be an exercise in ungrateful forgetfulness for all that God in Christ has already done for us (as noted throughout the earlier verses in this letter; cp. 2:9; 3:15, 17, etc.), selfish requests for material things, or foolish attempts to present utterly perplexing longings or questions to a God Who is neither perplexed nor capable of perplexity – not knowing what to say or do.

2. Prayer of Intercession (4:3-4)

By means of another present tense participle, and two *hina* (“that”) or purpose clauses, Paul specifies what other kind of action is to accompany or occur during continuous prayer (i.e., intercession): *proseuchomenoi hama kai peri hemon* – “praying at the same time for us also” – (1) *hina ho theos anoixe hemin thuran tou logou lalesai to mysterion tou Christou, di’ ho kai dedemai* – “that God may open for us a door/opportunity to speak the word about the mystery of Christ, for which I have been imprisoned” (v. 3): Paul’s desire is to have yet another opportunity to make known to others “the mystery of Christ” (mentioned already in 1:26-27 and 2:2) – the once-concealed but now-revealed message about God’s redemptive, saving work *in Jesus Christ alone* which is open equally for Jew and Gentile alike. His faithfulness to make known such a message has resulted in his imprisonment. So, Paul is praying and looking to God’s providential ability to further open doors in this regard (rather than seeking to do so himself). (2) *hina phoneroso auto hos dei me lalesai* – “that I may make it known as I ought to speak” (v. 4): Paul’s purpose-oriented, intercessory prayer request is that he may speak boldly, in accord with the majesty of that message, and to do so clearly, free from obstacles, and without confinement.

3. Profitable Behavior Before Non-Christians (4:5-6)

Sermons we see are more important than sermons we hear is the thrust of these two verses, especially toward those who do not embrace faith in Jesus Christ. Paul’s next command or imperative (“walk, live, conduct oneself”) *en sophia*⁶² *pros tous exo* (“in wisdom toward the outsiders”) is

⁶¹ Cp. footnote 47 for Paul’s other uses of this term.

⁶² *Wisdom* refers to knowing how to uncover secrets; good judgment or decision-making ability in the face of choices; knowing how to differentiate between mere opinions or perceptions which are in conflict with the will of God. Wisdom is mentioned elsewhere in this epistle in 1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16. Paul uses it also in Ro. 11:33; 1 Co.

explained by two participles (one present tense denoting simultaneous action – “redeeming”) and one perfect tense denoting antecedent action – “having seasoned or restored flavor”) both of which stress the absolute significance of this **wise vs. crafty** reality from two primary stand-points:

- a. *ton kairon exagorazomenoi* – “by redeeming the time” – This exact expression is used by Paul in Ep. 5:16. The word “redeem” is also used by Paul in Ga. 3:13 and 4:5. The word basically means to *buy back or use* the time which is allotted us in life and to do so in a constructive, fruitful manner. [In Ep. 6:16, Paul adds, “because the days are evil.” Although missing here, the implication is certainly the same.]
- b. *ho logos humon pantote en chariti halati ertumenos* – “since your speech has always been seasoned with salt [by this wisdom] to know how you ought to answer each one” – Paul’s statement in 3:17 (“whatever you do in word [speech] or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus . . .”) is here provided with motivation since the ability to always speak in grace [with graciousness] is possible. It is possible because such speaking has been “seasoned with saltiness” (wholesomeness, free from corruption, flavored with sensibility and attractiveness) in daily practice through walking in God’s wisdom. Furthermore, this combination of grace and wisdom manifests itself in *that they know how they ought to answer every man*. In other words, not only do the people of God need to accurately and adequately understand God but they also need to accurately and adequately understand people who are not Christians. The purpose of such comprehensive understanding is that they may respond to these “outsiders” with **answers** which are filled with insight, sympathy, sensitivity, intelligence, soundness, patience, persuasiveness, and appeal.

X Partners in Ministry (4:7-9)

A. Tychicus (4:7-8)

Tychicus (“fateful, chance, fortuitous”) is mentioned five times in the NT: **Ac. 20:4** (a companion of Paul, from the province of Asia, who accompanied Paul to Troas at the end of his third missionary journey; it is possible that he was one of the “we” who traveled with Paul); [Although not named, some have concluded that

1:17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 30; 2:1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13; 3:19; 12:8; 2 Co. 1:12; Ep. 1:8, 17; 3:10. James uses it in 1:5; 3:13, 15, 17; Peter uses it in 2 Pt. 3:15. It also occurs in Re. 5:12; 7:12; 13:18; 17:9.

he was the “brother” mentioned in 2 Co. 8:22]; *Ep. 6:21-22*; *Col. 4:7-8* (a dearly loved brother and faithful minister who was with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment and was sent with Paul’s letters to the Colossians to provide them information about Paul, thereby encouraging them); *2 Tim. 4:12* (a companion during Paul’s Roman imprisonments who was sent to Ephesus); *Ti. 3:12* (a companion of Paul who was sent to Titus).

B. Onesimus (4:9)

Also, called “the faithful and beloved brother,” Onesimus was a runaway slave who became a Christian during Paul’s imprisonment (Philemon 10) and decided to return to his master, Philemon. He is not described as a “servant” or “fellow-slave”⁶³ like Tychicus (v. 7). But since his conversion, he is “one of yourselves” now, not just a mere former runaway slave. Therefore, “they” (he and Tychicus) will inform the Colossians about what is happening in Paul’s imprisonment (cp. Ephesians 6:21-22).

XI Passionate Greetings from Associates (4:10-14)

A. Aristarchus (4:10)

Aristarchus is mentioned five times in the NT: Ac. 19:29; 20:4 (A native of Thessalonica, he was one of Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia and was with Paul when the riot broke out about the Way in Asia. He also went with Paul into Macedonia and to Greece on his way to Jerusalem with the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem); 27:2 (He also accompanied Paul as they sailed to Rome); Philemon 24 (He was also a fellow-worker with Paul while Paul was in prison in Rome); and here (as a fellow-prisoner⁶⁴ with Paul in Rome).

B. Mark (4:10)

Mark is here introduced as “the cousin of Barnabas” in order to strengthen his ties with Barnabas who was well-known to them as a result of his earlier work with Paul in Galatia on the first missionary journey. Mark had been with them for a while and then went home. Colossae was in Phrygia, very close to southern Galatia, and thus the association. In Philemon 24, Mark is named as another of his “fellow workers.” – along with Luke. So, despite the earlier differences Paul had with Barnabas about taking Mark on the second missionary journey, the former breach has obviously been repaired and Paul appraisal of him is now in the positive mode: he is to be received for lodging as Paul’s assistant and team member. In fact, the word translated “receive,” *dexasthe*, is in the imperative mood and indicates action that has no alternative.

⁶³ The word for “fellow-slave, fellow-servant” is *sundoulos* and is used by Paul only in this letter (1:7; 4:7). It is also used in Mt. 18:28, 29, 31, 33; 24:49; and Re. 6:11; 19:10, 22:9.

⁶⁴ The word, *sunachmalotos*, “fellow-prisoner” occurs in the NT only here and Ro. 16:7 with regard to Andronicus and Junias and Philemon 23 with regard to Epaphras.

C. Jesus, the one called Justus (4:11)

Jesus was a relatively common name with the Jews, and so is here surnamed Justus (cp. Ac. 1:23 and 18:7). “They being of the circumcision” refers to both Mark and Jesus/Justus. Paul also designates them as “the only fellow-workers⁶⁵ for the kingdom of God who became a comfort⁶⁶ to me.” The distinctive value which Mark and Jesus/Justus thus afforded Paul should be a reminder that no matter how little or insignificant people may think their service is, “little is much if God is in it.” Cp. Mt. 25:31-46.

D. Epaphras (4:12-13)

Epaphras is mentioned in the NT only in this letter (1:7; 4:12) and Philemon 23. The first reference to him, of course, is 1:7 where we are informed that it was he who brought news from Colossae to Paul. Apparently, he was the pastor or pastor-like figure of the church in Colossae. At the least, he was either a native of Colossae or had been living there for some time (“one of you”). Nevertheless, Paul speaks highly of him: *doulos Christou Iesou*, “slave, servant of Christ Jesus,” an expression he commonly applies to himself (also Timothy in Phil. 1:1).

Paul especially notes two things about the prayers of Epaphras: (1) **passion** – *pantote agonizomenos*⁶⁷ *huper humon en tais proseuchais*: “always agonizing for you in his prayers.” This passionate praying involves intensity, expenditure of energy, constant concentration, profound seriousness, struggle, warfare, endurance, determination, sacrifice. (2) **purpose** – *hina stathete teleioi*⁶⁸ *kai peplerophoremenoi en panti thelemati tou theou*: “that you may stand whole even being fully assured in all the will of God.” The perfect tense, passive voice participle, *peplerophoreo*,⁶⁹ denotes antecedent action relative to the main verb: “they may stand” (*stathete*) “since they have been fully assured or convinced in all the will of God.” In other words, God has given them full assurance about His will for them and that is why they now stand maturely and firmly in a state which will continue.

⁶⁵ The word for “fellow-workers,” *sunergos*, is used by Paul in Ro. 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Co. 3:9; 2 Co. 1:24; 8:23; Ph. 2:25; 4:3; 1 Th. 3:2; and Phi. 1, 24. It also is found in 3 Jo. 8.

⁶⁶ This is the only occurrence of this word, *paregoria*, in the NT. It denotes “comfort, solace, relief, consolation, alleviation, a soothing influence.”

⁶⁷ In addition to its two occurrences in Co. (1:29; 4:12), this word is found in Lk. 13:24; Jo. 18:36; 1 Co. 9:25; 1 Ti. 6:12, 2 Ti. 4:7.

⁶⁸ In addition to 1:28 and here, this word is also found in Mt. 5:48; 19:21; Ro. 12:2; 1 Co. 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Ep. 4:13; Ph. 3:15; He. 5:14; 9:11; Ja. 1:4, 17, 25; 3:2; 1 Jo. 4:18. It calls for completion, maturity, fully effective.

⁶⁹ This word also occurs in Lu. 1:1; Ro. 4:21; 14:5; 2 Ti. 4:5, 17. It indicates accomplishment, totally convinced, fully persuaded or proven.

Paul continues his positive perspective on Epaphras in v. 13: *marturo*⁷⁰ *gar auto hoti echei polun ponon huper humon kai ton in Laodekeia and ton en Hierapolei*: “For I bear witness to him that he has much zealous concern for you and to those in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis.” Epaphras put *polun ponon*: “much hard work, great zeal, deep concern” into his physical labors and works for not only the Christians at Colossae but also in Laodicea (2:1) and Hierapolis – all three cities in close proximity to each other in the Lycus River valley in the southern province of Asia. Epaphras may have been the one who carried the gospel to all three cities, thus his extreme concern for them.

E. Luke (4:14)

aspazetai humas Loukas ho iatros ho agapetos: “Luke, the beloved physician, sends you greetings” – Luke was a Gentile doctor who provided medical care to Paul who had great gratitude for him, even as a traveling companion and fellow-worker (cp. 2 Ti. 4:11; Philemon 24).

F. Demas (4:14)

The absence of any elaboration or identification references to him may indicate some unpleasant memories of their time together (2 Ti. 4:10: “Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica”). However, he is mentioned in Philemon 24 as a “fellow-worker” and is even mentioned before Luke in that passage.

XII Personal Instructions and Greetings from Paul (4:15-18)

’Aspasasthe tous en Laodikeia adelphous kai Numphan kai ten kat’ oikon autes Ekklesian: “Greet the brethren in Laodicea and Nymphan and the church in her house” – Laodicea was about 10 miles from Colossae and to greet “the brethren in Laodicea” would indicate some degree of familiarity and close communication between the two. This would seem especially so since v. 16 indicates that letters between the two are to be exchanged. Exactly what “the letter from Laodicea” was is simply unknown.

This is the only occurrence of the name Nympha in the NT. It appears that Nympha was either unmarried or a widow since reference is to “her house.” House-churches are noted in the NT: Ro. 16:5; 1 Co. 16:19; Phile. 2; also cp. Ac. 2:46; 5:42; 12:12. There may have been another larger congregation in Laodicea (cp. Re. 3:14-22).

V. 17: *kai eipate Archippo, Blepe ten diakonian hen parelabes en kurio, hina auten plerois*: “and tell Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you received in the Lord, to fulfill it” – Archippus is mentioned only one other time in the NT (Philemon 2 – “a fellow soldier” with Paul and possibly the son of Philemon and Apphia). Paul’s com-

⁷⁰ *Martureo*, “I bear witness to, testify, bear record, affirm, attest, commend,” is a word Paul uses in Ro. 3:21; 10:2; 1 Co. 15:15; 2 Co. 8:3; Ga. 4:15; 1 Th. 2:11; 1 Ti. 5:10; 6:13. Here it has the semi-legal force of an eyewitness, thus strengthening his support for Epaphras.

mand, *Blepe*, “take heed” signifies the turning of one’s thoughts in a certain direction so as to contemplate, weight or look at that direction with careful examination. No half-hearted attention is acceptable.

The type “ministry” he had “received in the Lord” is not clear: *diakonia* may refer to “ministry, service, support, help, possibly a deacon, providing relief, etc.” in many different areas. Whether or not Archippus had been lulled into complacency about his ministry is not certain, although some challenge from Paul was apparently necessary for some reason/s. Perhaps, he was confused over the false teachers and did not know how best to go forward. Whatever the exact nature of the case may have been, he needed to recall that the ministry he had received was “in the Lord” and accountability to Him was no small matter.

V. 18: *Ho aspasmos te eme cheiri Paulou. mnemoneuete*⁷¹ *mou ton desmon. he charis meth’ humon*: “The greeting, with my hand, from Paul. Remember my imprisonment. Grace on your side” – There are only three places in the NT where Paul closes a letter with these exact words: *Ho aspasmos tee me cheiri Paulou* (1 Co. 16:21; 2 Th. 3:17; and here). Paul does not mention his own name at the end of any other letters. Paul usually dictated what he had to say to another person who actually wrote it down. The expression, “with my hand” indicates that he authorized or authenticated what had been written with his own brief handwritten words.

The call to “remember my imprisonment” indicates a call for prayer in his behalf.

“grace on your side, grace with you, spiritual blessing with you” is a brief benediction which Paul uses only here and in 1 Ti. 6:21 and 2 Ti. 4:22. It is a call for the unlimited, unmerited favor of God to be viewed as something which is on their side or with them.

⁷¹ *Mnemoneuo*, “remember,” occurs in Paul’s writings in Ga. 2:10; Ep. 2:11; 1 Th. 1:3; 2:9; 2 Th. 2:5; 2 Ti. 2:8. It also is found in Mt. 16:9; Mk. 8:18; Lu. 17:32; Jo. 15:20; 16:4, 21; Ac. 20:31, 35; He. 11:15, 22; 13:7; Re. 2:5; 3:3; 18:5.

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